Family values

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Family values

by Joseph_Amadeus

Summary

Hannibal does the right thing and asks Will out after the Shrike case. However, Will prefers to have someone in his life he can rely on and he's uncertain he can maintain a romantic relationship. The men decide to remain friends. They even manage for a while.

Feat. the Lecter clan, admirable efforts to stop flirting for one damn second and pining

Notes

Betaed by HHL who lets me rant forever.

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1

Will's life was settled, organised. There was routine to it. He'd teach, he'd go home, he'd feed his dogs, he'd make an admirable effort at eating a few hot meals a day, but he'd mostly fail and resign to take out.

Failing and resigning had become a sort of a motif of his life. He'd resigned from the police when he got stabbed instead of shooting the suspect. He'd resigned to teaching when he failed the psych eval at the FBI. He'd resigned to having been deemed a psychiatric curiosity but he never failed to avoid psychiatrists. Nasty bunch, psychiatrists. What could they know about him, his soul, his frantic, violent, flexible mind.

He'd resigned to knowing what triggered him. He'd resigned to avoiding the things that would trigger him.

He'd resigned to his students.

Every Saturday he'd drive to Baltimore to his favourite Reform synagogue. He'd resigned to attending the study group there. He'd resigned to never showing off his eidetic memory, unless his rabbi asked in a loud whisper what this or that quote was. He'd resigned to replying absentmindedly and making his rabbi proud.

His life was orderly, calm, restrained. He'd look at the crime scenes via photos and tremble with excitement when he pictured someone annoying in place of a victim. He'd resigned to fishing and gutting his catch instead of someone else. He'd love to gut someone else! It would have helped to have someone to talk about it but he'd resigned to sparing his rabbi. Oh, she'd cover for him, but she was good, she was wicked, she was kind. Will wanted to be seen like that but he wasn't like that.

And then one day Jack Crawford walked into his class and broke every boundary Will had set. Jack touched him, forced him into eye contact and guilt tripped him into helping out with a case. Oh, his rabbi would hear about it! His rabbi wouldn't hear about how much Will wanted to gut Jack and have him screaming in pain for all the pain he was putting Will through. It was nothing to Jack, touching and eye contact, but to Will it was unsettling, and however used he was to all that shit, he didn't like it one beat. He didn't want to accept it. But Jack was persuasive, Jack was good with his words.

And so Will agreed to help and help he did.

Jack brought in a psychiatrist for Will.

The moment Will walked into Jack's office and saw Dr Lecter, he felt it, that immediate connection. It wasn't easy, it wasn't love, it wasn't infatuation. No, it was more along the lines of finding someone who Will could banter with, and so banter he did.

He began by insulting Dr Lecter when he confronted Will about that damn eye contact. Will raised his eyes to Dr Lecter's and stared into them like a weirdo that he was. Dr Lecter's eyes

were impenetrable, impossible to read. Dr Lecter's cheekbones were sharper than any of Will's knives, Dr Lecter's face had to have been carved by two Renaissance masters, because one wouldn't have sufficed.

And he was dressed in that ridiculous outfit, that fancy suit that was supposed to send the *trust me* vibes but instead made Will horny. Trust Will to ruin a perfectly good white suit. He even pretended to drink the terrible coffee from Jack's equally terrible coffee machine that used to be something else but found itself a good retirement plan in Jack's office.

Will got insulted by it all, mostly by that suit and those cheekbones and those deep Burgundy eyes. Normal mortal men had softer cheekbones, worse bone structure and couldn't pull off a white suit on a Tuesday in February.

Also, Will didn't want to be seen, and Dr Lecter saw him immediately. Will felt like a cozy little well in the desert that suddenly got a lamp lowered into it… It was a very Freudian image so Will ran off to give a lecture about psychoanalysis. Hot people had no right to profile Will.

Dr Lecter, pardon, *call me Hannibal* , showed up at Will's motel room in Minnesota with breakfast. Will wouldn't turn down a hot meal that wasn't some take out.

He heard himself confiding in the good doctor with the perfect arse.

"So… you're saying that the whole picture is a bit too much for you to understand its meaning?" Hannibal asked.

"Yeah. Kind of… You said it yourself, I can't turn my mind off. And this… this is like seeing Guernica for the first time. The picture, not the town."

"I figured," Hannibal smiled indulgently. "Tell me, Will, how good are you at maths?"

"Pretty hopeless. Why?"

"Do you remember those little quadratic equations? How you had to see a quadratic equation in a mess of numbers and letters?" Hannibal asked.

"Yeah, was traumatised by those."

Hannibal tsked. "One would always learn more from a good teacher. Why don't you look at this case as if it were one of those old school puzzles? It's a quadratic equation, Will, it has to be."

Will and his autistic brain thought hard.

"Simplifying," he whispered.

"Precisely. Now, I can't see people as clearly as you, but why don't you reduce that killer to a quadratic equation?"

"Do you have an algebra kink?" Will asked rudely.

"I'm afraid I do. But be it algebra, Stanislavsky, empathy or what have you, there's always an elegant equation, however difficult to contemplate or solve, at the basis of every human being."

"Am I one too?"

"Of course you are. The problem with all those people who try to poke at your mind is that they don't know maths… Oh, and I think that your mind is akin to the Riemann hypothesis. They can't solve you… But this killer is much simpler. I think so because you're a complex equation that can't be reduced to anything as simple as a quadratic equation."

"Thank you. The food is delicious. I have to think now."

Will chewed messily and thought.

"Oh for fuck's sake!" He exclaimed.

Hannibal looked very pleased with himself. Will had to taunt him and lure out the normative person in Hannibal.

"You know, I imagined a girl impaled on antlers and then it all became clear," Will overshared.

"So… a quadratic equation won't fit?" Hannibal enquired, very much unbothered.

"No, it won't. But trying to reduce it all to one made me see. He honours them, every part of them. He eats them and makes cushions with their hair… Oh fuck! Have I mentioned I'm Jewish?"

Hannibal sneered. "Then let's find him, Will, and show him what scum he is."

Will went and found him, Garret Jacob Hobbs. He had killed his wife and daughter and Will shot him ten times.

"You're one angel he couldn't wrestle with. Well done, Will," Hannibal soothed in the aftermath. "You were brilliant. Did you like killing him?" Hannibal asked, shameless.

"There's police around us," Will whispered.

"Oh, screw them, Will. What do they know? Why should I care?"

"It felt… righteous." Will looked up at Hannibal in fear.

"It had to. You wrestled him, however metaphorically, and he wasn't worthy of your strength and your anger. You are glorious, Will, never forget it."

Hannibal went with him to the hospital and fought against every doctor who wanted to stuff Will with sedatives. He sat by Will's bed and held his hand through a few panic attacks.

Jack sent Will to Dr Lecter for a psych eval. Alana, Will's crush and an unreachable ideal of normality, agreed with Jack. In Will's mind she died a little that day.

Hannibal sat in front of Will and remained silent for a few minutes. It prompted Will to rise from his chair and start pacing about Hannibal's office, examining the books and art.

Will was waiting for a gentle chiding but it never came.

"I like you, Will," Hannibal said finally. "It would be unethical for me to be your psychiatrist. Now, ethics is a complex and simultaneously limited beast, and I don't care much for it. However, I'm reluctant to engage in a power dynamic play with you, lest it could make you feel uncomfortable. You're uncomfortable enough as it is. I'll write whatever you want me to write for Jack Crawford, but afterwards… I'd rather date you than treat you."

Will stared at Hannibal from the balcony surrounding the upper level of Hannibal's office.

"Date me? Are you serious?"

"Very much so," Hannibal said calmly. "I can refer you to a different psychiatrist, but I can't be yours."

Will slowly descended down the ladder and approached Hannibal. "I don't want another psychiatrist," Will said. "And I can't date you, Hannibal. You… you get me. A romantic relationship is… It's full of traps. I'll fail at it. I don't want to fail and I can't guarantee being flexible and agreeable."

"Then you shall remain my friend," Hannibal said firmly. "I'll be here for you every step of the way, whatever that way may be. You're free to come to me anytime you want. Any time at all. But I can't be your psychiatrist."

"I don't need one," Will said quietly. "But having a friend… I'd love to have one."

"Then you have one. What should I write for Jack?"

Will paused. "I won't be able to kill someone every time. I don't want him to drag me out there and limit my wrath… I adopted a dog, another dog on my way from Minnesota. I think he had been abused and left to starve. I'd love to have been able to kill that person. If I have Jack's resources, I'd abuse them to track that person down. I can't handle that much power. I'm not a good person, but I don't want to be seen as a bad one either."

"They won't see you right," Hannibal agreed. "They'd reduce you to a square while you're obviously another shape, and not a Pythagorean one either."

"Yes. See, you get me."

Hannibal smiled and jotted something down. "There. Now Jack won't be able to use or abuse you unless you want him to."

"Did you write that I want to kill people?" Will asked, dubious.

"No, but I recommended him to do his job without any help from you. I was very polite."

Will laughed.

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Will returned to his routine. Jack of course found a different way to engage Will's talents. He supplied Will with the newest case files, just for his lectures, he reasoned, and then sat in Will's class and freaked out young trainees. More fool him, Will thought. This way there would be a lot of people quitting the FBI academy.

He called Hannibal out of the blue and a bit drunk one evening, just to share that observation.

"Will, hello."

"Hi. So… you said I could talk to you anytime. Most people don't mean it."

There was a pause. "I think you're drunk, Will. I still find it necessary to tell you that, just like you, at heart, I'm not a quadratic equation and therefore can't be solved as easily as most people."

"Well, I'm talking to you."

"I'm very glad you are, Will."

"Yeah? Even if I'm drunk?"

"Will I offend you if I quote Cohen and tell you that you may indeed come to me in happiness or in grief, in your deepest faith or disbelief?"

"My rabbi would have been so horny for you."

"Maybe I should ask them out."

"Maybe. She's married, though, and you know, a rabbi."

Hannibal hummed in vague understanding.

"Jack is intimidating my students. I'm so jealous. And annoyed." Will took a big swig from the bottle of cheap bourbon. "Did I tell you I adopted another dog? Called him Winston. But he's better than Churchill."

"It's not a difficult task," Hannibal mused.

"Right? I don't like Churchill. For a start, he was a racist and a bigot. Also, he could drink day and night and no one called him unstable!" Will complained.

"I'm sure there were enough people to complain about him. A great orator, though."

"You know about Ivan the Terrible? The Russian tzar?"

"Of course I do," Hannibal said with an air of someone who had met Ivan the Terrible.

"Well, he was a brilliant man. A maniac and sadist for sure, but fuck, what a writer!"

"A composer too," Hannibal agreed. "See, Will, Ivan the Terrible was unfit to rule because at heart he was an artist, that is, an impractical man with too much heart to waste and be corrupted. He could create a world, but couldn't rule the one he had been born into. So he twisted and tortured it until it could fit his vision. It's a scary perspective, isn't it? What would we do, given enough power, in order to shape the world according to our needs?"

Will scoffed. "Most people are quite satisfied with the world as it is."

"You can't begrudge them for it. Some see beauty and meaning everywhere," Hannibal argued.

"Yeah, and some don't go looking for either."

"Being raised in a society means we're infused with the notions of beauty and meaning as early as we receive our first vaccines. It takes a lot to step back and observe and admit that those notions, those standards are unfitting."

"Where do you find beauty and meaning, Hannibal?"

"Art. Cooking. The act of creation and consumption, I think. That's how I'd love to sum it up."

"Chronos."

"Perhaps. This is an interesting association. Were you thinking about the god or were you thinking about the time regardless of the mythological implications?" Hannibal asked.

"I said *Chronos* . Of course I meant… Actually I don't know what I meant." Will gazed around and found the room spinning like a debutante at a ball somewhere in Vienna around the early 1800s.

"Still, associations come quickly. Your mind's landscape is extremely challenging."

"It's because you never hike," Will concluded.

"Why, I used to hike a lot as a child."

"You should hike more as an adult," Will recommended.

"If I return to my metaphor, then I can safely say that, as a psychiatrist, I hike often. Yet, I must admit that your mind offers an overall different landscape."

"Escher?"

"Yes. Him too, but more… even more, I might add, fractal. Your empathy, your ability to assume any point of view and your tendency to assume the worst point of view… Oh, Will, it makes you a perfect human, and it makes you a perfect artist. Happiness is easy to imagine, but misery and pain are where the true fractal nature of our minds lie, and where true artistry lies as well."

"Are you flattering me, Hannibal?"

"I'm not. I'm teasing you. It should work better with you.

"When we met, the first thing I… saw about you was how easy it was for you to dive into the unknown waters of most depraved minds. You know why?"

"Apparently you do."

"And apparently, you don't. Regular minds are too easy for you, Will. Too boring. The minds of the killers you teach about… Well, they might not be particularly deep, but they're challenging you. Your morality isn't set in stone, you're too sensitive for it. Seeing, observing the workings of a terrible mind, this is what gets you going. And Will? It doesn't make you a bad person. Just a bored one, and oh, boredom is a dangerous state of mind."

"Yes," Will croaked. "Fuck, yes."

"I'm glad we understand each other."

"Are you… easily bored?" Will asked Hannibal.

"Extremely. This is why I deal with other people. As a friend, I can tell you that I find most of my patients dreadfully boring. I try to expand their horizons, for both their and my sake. It's empowering, teaching someone that the world is big and complicated, that their own souls are far more complex than they imagined."

"They must be scared of it," Will mused.

"Of course they are. But then they can't get enough. Our brain is a product of thousands of years of natural selection. It's embarrassing how few people use it and how little."

"Are *you* drunk, Hannibal?"

"No, I'm cooking. See, my sister is a fencer and she's coming to visit in a few months when there's a competition in New York. My parents trail after her all the time… In short, in a few months I have to be able to feed an Olympic champion." Hannibal was beaming with pride, Will could tell. "So I'm developing an appropriate menu for my precious sword woman."

Will wanted to ask Hannibal more about Mischa, but he wasn't sure, and he was tired. And drunk. He took a deep breath. "Will you tell me about her sometime?"

"I'd love to. Maybe over lunch? Would you like to join me and taste my Olympic menu?"

Will swallowed. "I'd love to," he said, his throat dry.

"Then come any day around noon."

"Goodnight, Hannibal."

"Goodnight, Will. Thank you for thinking about me."

Will hung up and cursed. Yeah, as if there had been anyone else worth thinking about.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

One eventual Wednesday Will decided to accept Hannibal's invitation to lunch.

Will could never comprehend the point of the mid days of the week having separate names. As far as he was concerned, Monday was for torture and Thursday and Friday were for taunting before the glory of Shabbat. The middle of the week was just more suffering and boredom and frustration wrapped in time. A visit to Hannibal's suddenly seemed like a good and easy way of alleviating the midweek blues.

He politely texted Hannibal and Hannibal replied that he'd be waiting *most eagerly.*

Will couldn't picture Hannibal doing anything *most eagerly* . The man was collected, put together, calm, not to mention rich, successful and respected. The only blues in his life must have been *Rhapsody in Blue* and maybe Buddy Guy, although Will, for all his famed imagination, couldn't quite see Hannibal rocking to Buddy Guy. He looked like a piano kind of guy, so maybe Ray Charles.

Will parked his car by Hannibal's house and stared. It was a castle, it was a damn castle.

Afterwards Will lost time. He came to Hannibal knocking gently on his car window, his face all concern and worry. Will gasped and looked at his hands. He was holding his phone and had apparently googled *how to enter a castle* . The results were a mixture of war strategy treatises and etiquette guides. Will didn't know which was more appropriate, so he opened the window.

"Hi?" He said.

"Will, hello. Are you alright? You've been sitting here awfully long." Hannibal pouted like a spoiled bitch but still concerned. Like a concerned spoiled bitch. Did he know what he did to Will with those legs of his and that house of his? Fucking arrogant goy, fucking upper middle class menace! Was he upper middle class even? Or was he more upper than upper?

"You live in a castle," Will said.

Hannibal looked back at his house. "No, I don't. My family owns a castle, and trust me, this is not a castle."

"I'd be looking for the servants' entrance."

"You shouldn't. You're a welcome and honoured guest whose arrival I have been anticipating."

"Eagerly?"

"Very much so. I believe I said just as much. May I open your car door?"

"Don't you have a footman for it?"

"I'm afraid I don't. You'll have to settle for my assistance. If I may."

"Do your worst."

Hannibal nodded and opened the car door for Will and offered Will his hand. "Friends don't hold hands," Will remarked and got out of the car on his own.

"They should. There's nothing wrong with friendly touch, unless you're uncomfortable with it."

"I'm very uncomfortable with touch in general."

Hannibal made a face of a very tactile person being refused some tactile experience. He didn't remark on it, nevertheless, and led Will inside what Will decided to call Hannibal's castle no matter what Hannibal said.

Will was put into the dining room that was dark and had a wall herb garden. Hannibal left and returned with two plates that smelled of temptation and salmon.

"I realise I've been very rude and haven't asked you whether you observe kashrut…"

"Not so much," Will interrupted. "I'd eat any seafood. But I won't eat a cheeseburger."

"I definitely won't cook you one," Hannibal said, pursing his lips.

Will gazed at his plate. The salmon looked perfect. The asparagus looked good enough to eat… Oh, it was all here to eat, right! Even Will was here to eat. So Will ate, that is, gingerly put a piece of salmon into his mouth — and moaned so hard that all current viewers of Pornhub treasures pricked up their ears to greet the new king.

Hannibal cleared his throat. "I understand it is to your liking," he concluded.

"No shit! This is amazing. It's the best salmon I've ever had! Fuck, do you cook like a chef all the time?"

"I strive to," Hannibal replied sternly but he looked very pleased and smug.

"Fuck," Will moaned again, this time about asparagus.

"It is rather phallic in shape," Hannibal deadpanned.

Will heard himself laughing. He never laughed. He bitterly chuckled every now and then, but that was it.

"Don't fish for compliments. I bet you don't fish. I fish. There's a stream behind my house and I go there often. To fish." Will briefly regretted his intellectual capabilities leaving him in

favour of a primal experience of eating like some kosher animal, for example, a goat.

"Is it your place of solace and comfort?" Hannibal asked. He didn't look like he was particularly impressed with himself and that was simultaneously a shame and an endearing show of humbleness.

"You could say that. I like wading into it, putting my head back, just… being for a while. What is yours? Place of solace and comfort, I mean." He raised his head, risking a look at Hannibal.

"Physically, my kitchen. Spiritually, my mind palace. It feels liberating to be able to create my own physics."

"Wow, never occurred to me I could do that. Now I'm ashamed." Will blushed and continued eating like a goat.

"You shouldn't. Adapting to the existing conditions and making the best of them is nothing but admirable," Hannibal said. "Would you like some wine? I'm afraid I can't partake since I have more patients later, but…"

Will interrupted Hannibal, again. "No, I'm fine. Water is good."

"Will you allow me to make you coffee later?"

"Yeah, why not. I'm totally sold to your culinary skills."

Hannibal smiled. "I'm honoured."

"You… I… would you like to tell me about your sister?" Will asked. He guessed correctly, Hannibal immediately lit up.

"Mischa… Oh, my Mischa is a treasure. She's just too good to be true. I had been an only child for 25 years and then my parents, quite unexpectedly, had her. Being a late child, she's cherished and loved. It was left to me to spoil her." Hannibal seemed especially delighted about said duty. "She found our collection of swords when she was four and our father taught her what he knew, which hadn't been much or enough. She's the only Lithuanian fencer competing on the international level. So far she's won one gold Olympic medal and two silver ones. She started very young. My parents encouraged her through and through and they travel with her, or rather, as I said, they trail after her, as in, they enjoy themselves and pretend not to watch over Mischa.

"She's a sabre fencer, so every year I give her an antique sword, both to let her try her skills with an old weapon and to add to our collection once she gets bored of it. Just like you and I, she gets bored easily."

Suddenly Hannibal pinned Will to his place with a heavy and arousingly scary gaze. "She's my light, my first friend. I hadn't had friends before her. I couldn't bring myself to open up to someone… But with the joy her company brought into my life, I did manage to find some friends…"

"But none as good as her," Will said quietly.

"No, none as good as her." Hannibal grinned. "Do you have any siblings?"

"We're being so good here at following various social scripts," Will sighed. "No. My mother left when I was very young, so if I have any siblings, I don't know about them." He paused. "Any boyfriends you wanted to kill?"

"Oh, she prefers women, and my mother is a Sforza, so she…"

"Is very good at intriguing and is an expert tactician?" Will offered.

"Yes, precisely." Hannibal's smile was so fond it didn't suit his otherwise untouchable demeanour.

"Why did you come to America?" Will asked.

"Oh, I was a curious child and a bit of a prodigy, so eventually my drawings secured me a place in Johns Hopkins."

"Just a bit?" Will teased.

"I wouldn't want to boast. There are and have been more gifted children. But after homeschooling and various tutors proved to be insufficient, I went to live with my aunt and uncle in Paris." Hannibal's face turned to stone.

"Sorry, you don't have to…"

"No, whyever not?" Hannibal shrugged. "I lived with them and I entered the Sorbonne at the age of 15. My aunt, a Japanese woman much younger than my uncle, felt lonely and found a friend in me."

"And then being a friend wasn't enough," Will whispered, inwardly cursing his ability to *see* things.

"Indeed it wasn't. My uncle didn't believe me, so for a while I thought I was imagining things. Eventually my parents came for a visit and I confided in them. They moved to Paris immediately and I stayed with them for a while.

"Afterwards I moved to Florence and they returned to Lithuania. I encouraged them to… You know, Will, I never talk about it." Hannibal lowered his eyes to his empty plate.

"And I'm sorry I made you feel like you had to," Will said softly. "Is there any kind of reciprocity that I may offer?" What was wrong with him? Why was he talking like that? Why did he care about Hannibal's vulnerability? It was all very weird.

"I don't think so," Hannibal replied, quite distant all of a sudden. "I must admit it felt good to talk about it to someone. To you." He looked up at Will.

"I can't be your psychiatrist."

"Oh no, I talk about it with my psychiatrist or rather, I used to. I've never talked about it with a friend. With an equal." Hannibal's eyes were bright with a bittersweet joy of actually finding an equal. "I promised you coffee."

Coffee was splendid, of course.

"I think even friendship might prove too difficult," Will admitted meekly into his cup.

"Of course, Will. Vulnerability is difficult." Hannibal seemed resigned.

"But I think, I mean… I don't know much about friendships either, but the general agreement appears to be that… friends are more forgiving, easier to navigate around."

Hannibal looked at Will so hopefully, so eagerly.

"And I mean… you're a psychiatrist and I always avoid those… but maybe I should indeed keep my enemies closer?" Will mused.

"I'm not your enemy, Will. I'm convincing myself right now that you aren't mine either."

"Oh, if it's hard for us both, then I'm in," Will laughed awkwardly.

"Come back for another lunch, or dinner."

"No, no, no, quid pro quo, Hannibal. Come over to mine. I'll catch you a good fat trout." Will grinned. He needed to get out of here, and soon. However much he enjoyed the experience, it was all too new, too raw, too sudden.

"When may I come over?"

"Ehm… any Sunday?"

"Any Sunday it is then."

They parted very politely and Will drove back to Quantico for some late classes and an evening of grading. Fuck, it was hard being around other people, but being around the people he liked, that was downright impossible.

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Hannibal came over a few days later, since it was technically *any Sunday* . Will was both happy and terrified to see Hannibal's Bentley approaching his house.

Luckily Will had gone fishing in the morning, but then again, he did so quite often on Sundays.

He felt significantly better when his dogs rushed to greet Hannibal and promptly peed over all four wheels. Hannibal observed it with a stoic face and an indulgent smile. "I hope I'm not unwelcome," Hannibal said.

"Oh for fuck's sake, double negation? Really? There are easier ways to make a positive statement."

"But would it be just as much fun?" Hannibal asked conspiratorially.

"Hmmm… I didn't think about it like that. Well, come in."

Hannibal walked in and took a long look around. "This is very cozy," he remarked.

"Well, it's not a castle."

"If you ever honour me and my family with a visit, you'll discover that an actual castle is much more chaotic than any TV show or book would let you believe. I grew up with plenty of pets and once tried to drag a horse into the castle proper because it was very cold and I was ten."

Will laughed. There it was again, he was laughing. Terrible. Hurt his throat and other parts.

"I sleep in my living room," Will said instead of anything else.

"So I've noticed. It's a very childlike desire, to avoid a separation of any kind, including that between different spaces in one's house." Hannibal took off his coat and gloves and approached Will's counter, observing Will's gutting skills.

"You're calling me childish?"

"I said that it, not you, is very childlike. I understand your need to test me, Will. You're free to go wild, I assure you." He kept staring at Will's hands. "I used to be an ER surgeon and I must say your skill with a knife is stunning. Mischa would approve too."

"Why, I so need the approval." Will tossed some guts into the garbage.

"I don't think you do. However, I can't help but remark on your skill." He stared and stared at Will's bloody hands.

"You know, most people would have freaked out."

"Most people wouldn't be able to admire a good skill unless said skill could be used to make them rich or powerful."

Will had a feeling, a sharp and clear feeling that had they been dating, Hannibal would have lifted Will's filthy hands to his lips and kissed them.

"This skill makes me sated," Will snapped.

"An artist's hand remains such, be its dexterity applied to a painting or lunch. Oh…" Will saw the moment Hannibal noticed his lures. "And you're quite an artist. May I?"

"Sure. Why are you wearing a suit on a Sunday?"

Hannibal looked down at himself. "I'm paying a visit to a friend and it's my Sunday suit."

Alright, Will could admit that they were both weird, even if one of them was wearing a suit that must have cost an arm and a leg. Not Hannibal's obviously, but someone definitely had lost some limbs adjusting this perfection to the perfection that was Hannibal's physique.

"It's not your only Sunday suit, is it?" Will asked instead of telling Hannibal to stop bending over Will's working table, suit or no suit.

"Of course it isn't. But it's comfortable and a favourite of mine… It was a gift from Mischa." Hannibal's smile could have revived a gutted fish. Lord knows what kind of life it would have had, but it would have lived. Will decapitated it so it didn't get any ideas. And then filleted it so it kept having no ideas.

"Would you like my help?" Hannibal asked.

"Nah, I'm good. Help yourself. There's beer in the fridge and wine I got from my rabbi when I quoted a midrash she didn't know about…"

Hannibal hummed and found the wine. "Very good," he praised after the first sip. "Would you like some?"

"Beer," Will said and tossed the fish fillets on the skillet. With vengeance. He couldn't tell what he was angry about, only that he indeed was very angry.

Hannibal opened him a can and didn't do anything other than putting the can by Will and stepping back.

They were silent for a while and Will was worried Hannibal was getting bored or tired or just as angry… He turned around and saw Hannibal scratching Winston behind the ears and talking to him in what Will assumed was Lithuanian. Speaking of masking, Winston's masking was impeccable. He could have tricked anyone that he understood Lithuanian, although judging by Hannibal's intonation it was mostly along the lines of being a very good boy. Other dogs approached too, eager for some international experience with a Baltic flavour. Come to think of it, it sounded like a porn title.

So naturally Will made some bulgur. It was quick, it was relatively healthy, it wasn't as obvious as, say, rice.

Hannibal kept petting Will's dogs. Will hadn't ever thought that he could provide such entertainment for a guest.

Will pondered a bit and turned bulgur into tabbouleh. He did have some herbs himself. It was a Sunday after all and that meant that some well meaning people in the synagogue had forced him to accept some food on Saturday. He was the only single person there past the age of bar

mitzvah. He was the only single person past the age of bar mitzvah who didn't have a family. So he was given some herbs.

"Here it is," Will announced, messily plating the food.

"Oh, it looks wonderful," Hannibal said and washed his hands after the dogs in the kitchen sink. He washed them like a surgeon, scrubbing and leaving no fold, no wrinkle untouched. Will could eat his hands and it would have been fine, bacteria wise. Kosher wise… Probably not so much.

"No need to flatter me," Will said and stuffed his face with fish and tabbouleh.

"I'm not flattering you. I can enjoy a simple meal, if it's not made by me. If I make a simple meal, I feel as if I had… what is it you say? Half-arsed it?"

Will had two choices. He could either spit out his food or he could choke on it. He choked on it and Hannibal looked at him with the same expression of concern. "Did I say something wrong?"

"No, no, no," Will assured and drank some beer.

"It's not recommended to drink after choking." Hannibal winced.

"It's just," Will ignored him, "I… I can't believe you said something with *arse* in it."

"I do have one, so technically, every time I introduce myself or even say *I,* I'm saying something with arse in it." Hannibal smiled a bit, watching Will carefully. He grinned when Will laughed.

"Also there are words like *parse, parcel, arsenal* … Oh fuck, arsenal." Will had a giggling fit over an arse joke. He was 33 and he had a giggling fit over an arse joke.

Somehow Hannibal found it funny as well. "Parsimonious," he added.

Will had another giggling fit.

"Arsenic," Hannibal said when Will calmed down a bit. Naturally, Will went on giggling.

They parted at dusk. Will's face hurt. Hannibal's car was thoroughly marked by Will's dogs. Will decided he liked having friends.

Chapter End Notes

I did it myself, I mean, the midrash thing. Midrash is basically Torah fanfic. Yeah, we're that advanced.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

> Double update day. Be sure to read chapter two first. Also, yeah, I hate Murasaki. If you love her, don't read.
> CW for this chapter is a very triggered Hannibal. Basically he sleeps with Alana bc she reminds him of his abuser and bc he wants to stop being reminded of her.
> Hannibloom was hard to write and I won't do it again ever. I hope. But for now it's here.
> Just remember that Hannigram is the end game.

It was cold and quite early in the morning and Will was standing on the roof of his house in his underwear and shivering.

He looked around, looked back. His dogs had gathered by the window and were whining miserably.

Will climbed back into the house and decided to avoid thinking about it. He was used to having nightmares and he had sleepwalked as a child, so it might have been just that. Jack had been particularly persistent lately, and Will had to take a look at a lot more pictures and files than he'd like to. Just that, he mused, just that, just stress, just Jack.

He considered telling Hannibal about it, but why ruin their weekly lunches and monthly dinners? Why ruin one damn good thing that was about Will alone? And not Will as a member of the congregation, not Will the teacher, not Will the magical empath. Hannibal wanted Will's company and Will wanted to provide Hannibal with it, since he himself wanted the same in return — just Hannibal's company.

A few days later he came to in his classroom. It was very late and Alana was standing in front of him, beautiful and worried. She'd always looked worried when she looked at him, and that worry was cold and impersonal. She'd save him or she'd save a puppy or she'd save a traumatised child. She'd save them all without a care in the world. It shouldn't have hurt so much. After all, she was good in general and good at saving in particular.

"Just rehearsing my next lecture," Will lied. Last thing he remembered was actually giving a lecture.

Alana frowned and brushed one of Will's curls from his forehead. "You're working too much," she said softly.

"I'm… I'm fine. I'm fine. What are you doing here at this hour?"

"Was helping Jack out. Wanted a stroll and it's too dark and cold outside." She smiled. Oh, how he liked her smiles! How he liked her impersonal warmth, her detached care, her unattainable affection that was the same for everyone! How he yearned to be loved by someone like that, someone normal, someone who wouldn't lose time or sanity to a few gruesome pictures and a flight of imagination.

"Ok, ok, got it." Will nodded. "Want me to walk you outside?"

She smiled again and nodded, so demure and tender, so, so soft and pretty. So kind.

Will walked her to her car and said goodbye, then drove back home.

He woke up in the middle of the road in his underwear — again — with Winston right next to him, worried sick.

Will dismissed it as well. He cancelled his lunch with Hannibal because he didn't want to miss it too. He could feel that Hannibal was suspicious but he suggested a rain check and that was it.

A few nights later Will heard something moving, scratching in his chimney, so he shot through the wall and tore it apart.

Alana was there suddenly. She said she had been worried about him, said he had seemed strange, disconnected recently.

Will wanted to laugh in her face and remind her that he was like that all the time and that he had noticed how she'd never be alone in a room with him… But she was now.

Will told her about the animal in the chimney and then he leaned in, leaned closer to her warmth and sweetness…

Alana kissed him back, she kissed him hotly, as if she had wanted it too. He knew he had wanted it since they met, but this…

She pulled back. "We can't, Will. We're not good for each other." Her face remained close to his. She was honest in her regret. She might even go and say…

"You're handsome and clever and I do have feelings for you, but…" She squeezed his shoulders. "I won't be able to handle it."

Will wanted to snap at her and tell her that he didn't want to be handled. Like every other person in the world he wanted to be loved. He didn't want to be considered clever or handsome, only desirable, a next of kin.

A more mature part of him reasoned that she had done the right thing. She had been earnest and open.

The moment she left, Will drove off to Hannibal's.

He stormed inside Hannibal's house and straight out blurted, "I kissed Alana Bloom."

"Well… do come in," Hannibal said, rather belatedly.

Upon noticing the table set for two, Will rounded on Hannibal, both frustrated and guilty. "I… interrupted."

"You didn't. It was Dr Chilton. You've just missed him, which is for the better, don't you think?" Hannibal teased fondly.

"Why would you have that weasel for dinner?" Will asked, crossing his arms. Both he and Hannibal had once agreed that Dr Chilton was striving to be a poor man's version of Hannibal, as Will had put it. "You can trust me," Will had said. "I'm a poor man." Hannibal wisely hadn't argued.

"I'm trying to avoid eating him, so this is the next best thing," Hannibal joked. Oh, he'd always joke with Will when Will wasn't ready for a serious conversation.

"He's not kosher," Will grumbled.

"How can you tell? Have you examined his hooves?" Hannibal asked.

"Don't flatter him. He has boring human toes. Not kosher. I kissed Alana Bloom. Why did he leave?"

"He left because something had happened in his hospital. You know how he is."

Will nodded and followed Hannibal to the kitchen. "But I have dessert for two," Hannibal announced and began plating the dessert. "Tell me, what was Alana's reaction?"

"Not good for her. She's not good for me." Will rubbed his face.

"I agree." Hannibal put something sweet and delicious in front of Will and he began shoving it into his mouth, paying no attention to the taste. Hannibal sighed.

"You're supposed to be my friend, you know?" Will spoke with his mouth full.

"As your friend, I intend to be entirely honest with you. You contain multitudes, Will. Alana, with all due respect, contains just herself, which is a good quality for a psychiatrist. Was that why you kissed her? A clutch for balance? Reaching out for someone you consider normal?"

"Yes," Will admitted. "She kissed back, though."

"Of course she did. You're an attractive man and she's attracted to you."

"Not enough apparently."

"That's unfair, Will. She was honest with you."

Will sulked. "There was… a noise in my chimney. I thought it was an animal stuck there. There wasn’t an animal, and she… she knew." He raised his eyes to Hannibal. "I'm losing time. I sleepwalk."

Suddenly Hannibal was very close to Will and he… he inhaled.

"Did you just smell me?"

"I did." Hannibal smelled him again.

"Hannibal! We're friends! Friends don't smell each other!" Will chided. And kept eating.

"Have you met your own dogs, Will?" Hannibal asked and gently lifted Will's face to take a better look at his eyes.

"They smell each other's arses!"

"Arsenic," Hannibal said.

Will, despite himself, giggled.

"I can smell you there as well," Hannibal offered evenly.

"No, thank you. Why are you smelling me?"

"I think you have encephalitis. You smell of it." Hannibal spoke as if he had been talking about the weather which was shit, by the way.

"Smell of it?" Will blurted out.

"Yes. I once smelled terminal cancer on one of my teachers, long before he got diagnosed."

Will tensed.

"You don't smell of cancer. I'm taking you to the hospital. Who can watch your dogs?"

"You?" Will asked like a brat.

"I can't. I'll be staying with you."

"Alana. She'd love to. She loves my dogs."

Hannibal didn't say that she'd better like Will more than his dogs. He wanted to, however.

"I'll talk to her. Let's go."

Hannibal led Will out of the house and into his car.

"It's late, Hannibal, I…"

"I don't care. You need treatment and you're going to get it," Hannibal threatened. "I want you healthy and strong when my family visits."

"You want me to meet your family?" Will asked.

"Of course! You're my friend! Such a silly boy you are sometimes!"

Thankfully Will's fever skyrocketed after that and he understood where he was only hours later when he opened his eyes and realised he was in a hospital bed, hooked to several IVs and with Hannibal asleep in a chair next to him.

He wanted to reach out and touch his hair. He wanted to wake Hannibal up and scream at him that he had to go and have a life and be happy far from the mess that was Will Graham. But he felt too weak for any of it. His body, having found someone to rely on, had swiftly resigned to being sick and sickly. Will resigned too, and fell asleep.

*

Alana arrived at around ten in the morning to find Hannibal, utterly impeccable, by Will's bedside. Hannibal had left Will's side for a quick trip back home, to shower and change.

"What happened?" She asked in a whisper, approaching both her former mentor and Will's bed.

"Good morning, Alana. Will has been… unwell. I smelled encephalitis on him and acted accordingly."

"Smelled it on him?"

"Indeed."

A heavy silence settled over them.

"I didn't know you two were close," Alana said finally.

"He's a dear friend," Hannibal said proudly. He was holding Will's hand.

"He is a dear," she whispered affectionately. "I took care of his dogs. We could visit them later, if you want." Alana walked closer to Hannibal, he looked up at her.

"I'd love that very much," Hannibal rasped.

Alana leaned closer to him, face to face. "It's OK," she said. "You're not alone and neither is he."

She leaned closer still and kissed Hannibal.

And Hannibal kissed her back. He rose from his seat and gathered her in his arms. Let no one gaze into his mind at the moment, for he was lost and scared and offered comfort that he didn't need. It would have been rude to refuse it, wouldn't it?

It was Lady Murasaki all over again, he thought, kissing Alana harder. It was so difficult to refuse affection, in whatever way, shape or form. He loved being loved and somewhere along the way, most likely during his time in Paris, he had lost the notion of rejecting unwelcome affection. Alana wasn't like Murasaki. And she was exactly like her. She was offering affection at the time of need, but this time he was the older one, the mentor, the teacher, the friend.

They stumbled into the nearest public bathroom. Alana locked the cubicle and returned to kissing him.

"Will he die?" She asked meekly.

"No, no, he won't." He kissed her worry away. He had done it before. He had kissed Murasaki's worry away too. He had been told that it was how friends comforted each other.

His body betrayed him once again. The only difference was that now he just opted for going down on Alana and when she came into his mouth, he kissed her again and adjusted her hair, black like Murasaki's, and told her they should return to Will's side.

Alana smiled gently. "It's unfair and impolite."

He froze and let her have her way with him. She stroked him softly, far too softly, she whispered warmth and sweetness into his ears. He couldn't push her away and he couldn't let himself come.

"I'm sorry, Alana, it seems I'm a bit too stressed at the moment."

She kissed him again and praised him. He smiled at her and died a bit more inside. She was lovely, he admired her and he hated her. She wasn't like his aunt. She was so much better, but he was just as pliant and obedient in her hands.

They returned to Will. Alana excused herself eventually and Hannibal stayed. He cancelled or rearranged most of his patients.

Will woke up for a few moments, enough for Hannibal to offer him some water and terrible bullion.

"I'd make you some better soup," Hannibal promised.

"Jewish penicillin," Will mumbled.

Hannibal was perplexed but googled it. Chicken soup. He could make him chicken soup.

He considered calling his mother. But he couldn't worry her like that again. He couldn't admit that he had been taken advantage of, again, in his late forties. No, his mother deserved better.

And he knew, he realised somewhere far too deep to comprehend it fully, that his mother wouldn't care about *again* or *late forties* ; that she'd come immediately, she'd hold him and keep him safe and tell him that he owed his love to no one.

And what would he tell her? That he had fallen in love with someone who didn't need a lover? She'd tell him that it sucked and ask him to cook her some artichokes. And he'd be happy.

But Will was sick and it wasn't about Hannibal.

Instead Hannibal went home to make Will some chicken soup and drove to Will's house with Alana.

She looked lovely in the late March woods, with dogs all around her. She was safe, she was safe. She was safe.

He fucked her in the back seat of his car, slow and languid, he was good, he made her come, he kissed her afterwards. He hated her. He didn't know how to hate her and she held him soft and gentle.

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Sad chapter. That's all I can say.

"So, what did I miss?" Will asked cheerfully when Hannibal picked him up from the hospital two weeks later.

For some reason he opted to take the back seat, thoroughly cleaned of course, but the distance hurt. Was he having one of his unfailingly correct hunches? Was he sensing something was amiss? Was he giving Hannibal the space he didn't need? Was he just another person offering Hannibal something he didn't need and thus abusing Hannibal's politeness?

It was otherworldly, to be able to look at Will only through the rear view mirror.

"Alana and I have begun dating," Hannibal said, sparing no hurt to either of them. He chanced a look at Will. He was looking out of the window.

"Well, good for you, I guess," he said. It didn't take him a long time to come up with an answer. "You've known each other for quite some time, right? Maybe something was blossoming, as they say, between you two." He shrugged. "You just needed a trigger, didn't you? I mean, it's kinda, I don't know, peculiar how I rejected you and she rejected me and the next thing I know you're together. Should I feel something about it? I don't feel anything about it." He appeared surprised at his own reaction or rather, the lack thereof.

"You don't owe anyone anything, Will. I agree that the timing and circumstances aren't the most fortunate…"

"But are you happy?" Will asked, interrupting Hannibal, again, he'd always interrupt Hannibal, and while Hannibal usually hated being interrupted, with Will it was the sign of Will's involvement and eagerness, of his understanding.

"It's too early to make such conclusions. I can say that my relationship with her, the way it progressed helped me to cope with your illness."

"Oh, so *you* needed to cope with it?"

"You're my friend, Will, I cherish you and enjoy your company. I did need to cope with your illness. So did she, apparently."

"Wow, I'm quite a matchmaker, huh? Fuck, don't mind me. I'm glad that you two are… together."

Because you want to observe and are too scared, too cowardly, too traumatised to participate , Hannibal thought. Out loud he said, "I'm happy there are no hard feelings."

"I'm an adult, Hannibal. Neither of you owes me a thing."

"We don't. But we care about you. I care about you."

"I know you do," Will said barely above whisper. "I think I forced myself to stop thinking about what Alana thinks or feels about me. She rejected me and I respect it. I hope she can remain a friend. She has been a great friend, after all. Watching my dogs and all."

Hannibal squeezed the steering wheel so hard the leather squeaked. "Basic kindness isn't a sign of friendship, Will."

"You and I have different notions of basic kindness. It shouldn't be surprising, frankly. I'm quite rude and unstable."

"You were sick, and I never minded your rudeness. In your case, rudeness doesn't imply abuse of power. Actually, it's exactly the opposite with you. Your sass, your sarcasm, your defensiveness come from an entirely different place, and I admire it all about you."

"We also make stupid jokes about arses."

"Farce," Hannibal offered with a grin towards the mirror.

"Mars," Will smiled back.

They spent the rest of the way making stupid jokes about arses.

"I appreciate everything you did, but… I want some space. I haven't been properly alone for some time," Will said meekly. "I know you like… you like taking care of me, but I need some time just for myself."

Hannibal nodded stiffly. "Alana will bring your dogs in a few hours."

"Yeah, I know. Thanks again, Hannibal." And he leaned in and kissed Hannibal's cheek. "Yeah, friendly affection is great." He grinned at Hannibal and exited the car. "I hope our lunches and dinners will resume," he said, looking inside the car while being so hopelessly outside of Hannibal's space and reach. "I know it's something I have no say about, but… just so you know, it's OK if Alana joins us. That's what friends do, right? And we can be stupid and make her blush and then you'll kiss it all away and all."

Before Hannibal could reply, Will closed the car door and swiftly walked to his house.

Hannibal had had it cleaned and had stuffed Will's fridge with enough reheatable meals to last a week or so.

By the time he'd arrived at his house, he got a message from Will thanking him for everything and calling him an idiot for caring so much.

Hannibal couldn't put it off any longer. He needed a talk with his psychiatrist and more importantly and joyously, with his mother. He decided to start with the psychiatrist.

*

"Hannibal, what a surprise," Bedelia said, looking anything but surprised, when she opened the door of her house. She had been retired for several years but Hannibal was very persuasive and thus he had remained her sole patient.

"I did make an appointment," he reminded, tilting his head just so.

Bedelia smiled indulgently and let him in.

"Wine?" She offered.

"Of course. Ours is an unconventional relationship after all."

Bedelia poured them both a glass of wine and sat in front of Hannibal.

"I started seeing Alana Bloom," Hannibal said.

"Did you? Last time we talked you seemed quite satisfied with being Will Graham's friend and nothing else to anybody," Bedelia reminisced.

"It might have been childish of me," Hannibal replied.

"Just a bit," Bedelia commented good-naturedly. "However," she continued, "it showed your readiness to commit. Perhaps the recent events only prove that said readiness might have been misguided."

"She has black hair and she offered me comfort and affection when I was lonely and scared, sitting by Will's bed. He'd been sick. He's fine now."

"She triggered you," Bedelia said bluntly.

"I still enjoy her company. I think I'm capable of having an affair with a smart brunette, regardless of my previous experiences."

Bedelia hummed.

"You doubt me?"

"Never. You're my patient and I'm invested heavily in you being able to overcome your trauma. However, I must point out that the timing disproves my notion of your commitment being misguided and simultaneously proves that… You haven't left that dark forest."

"The dark forest was where Dante found the deepest truth of his life," Hannibal argued.

"Do you feel like you're experiencing or at least approaching the deepest truths of your life?" Bedelia asked knowingly.

"Said truths would make my relationship with Alana completely dishonest."

"Only this time you're the one being dishonest," Bedelia mused.

"I do like her. I don't want to be triggered by black hair or soft affection. It makes me doubt my sexuality and gives way to quite biphobic thoughts."

"There's no doubt about your sexuality, Hannibal. I don't doubt it and neither do you. You're using the wrong term, though. You're attracted to Will Graham because he's Will Graham, not because he's a man. That makes you a pansexual."

"I'm attracted to Alana too. She comforted me and distracted me."

"Do you think she'd be comfortable knowing she was the next best thing?"

"I made no promises. We see each other, enjoy each other's company, and the sex is…"

"Available," Bedelia suggested when Hannibal's pause became too long.

"Good," Hannibal countered.

"There's nothing wrong about a possibility of fulfilling sex with a willing partner. From what you have told me about Alana, she's a black and white kind of person. Do you crave some… binary clarity in your life?"

"I don't crave it but I find it comfortable."

"So this is what she is to you, comfortable?"

"Is there something wrong with comfort?" Hannibal asked.

"Only the way it triggers you. You're a hedonist at heart and a man capable of much love. I think you want to experience it all, and if you can't have the deep, you'll have the shallow."

"You're implying that I'm settling for something I don't really want?"

"I'm implying that your affair with Alana is born out of pain, out of fear. It's not a good enough foundation for a solid relationship, but then again, no relationship is ever entirely certain. You might as well find happiness and fulfillment with her."

"I don't want to find either with her," Hannibal admitted. "On some level, I wanted to make Will… jealous. More aware of me. See, she had rejected him since she deemed him too unstable."

Bedelia couldn't help but laugh and Hannibal couldn't help but join her.

"Does it please you, that she can't see you fully?"

"There's some pleasure to this deception," Hannibal admitted.

"Someone you feel easy and comfortable with rejects you, so you go and get involved with someone who only sees the good, the respectable, and dismisses the naughty. She admires your shell and doesn't care about the snotty innards."

"You do love oysters, Dr du Maurier."

"That I do. Just like you I find the artist more interesting than the art. It's a professional curiosity, an instinct, if you want. The shapeless mess that comes up with a perfect design is far more intriguing than the shell guided by evolution, Fibonacci sequence, what have you."

"I love Will's shapeless mess. And his conch."

"Hannibal… I allowed you to remain my patient for moments like that." Bedelia refilled their glasses.

"It all seems quite… orderly. Quite right. It makes me sick, though."

"It's not what you want, Hannibal. Why do you think you keep it up?"

"Because someone I trusted and loved shaped me according to their needs."

"You're angry about it, aren't you?"

"I am."

"You think your anger ties you to your aunt, or on the contrary, you rejoice in being the one who shapes things?"

"I want to be happy, Dr du Maurier. I want to be happy by any means possible."

"Yet, with all the means possible, you aren't happy."

"It can't be because I… because of my aunt."

"None of us is that simple, least of all you. People of your level of intelligence find it more difficult to be happy. Your mind moves too fast, gets bored too easily. I admire your efforts at finding some simple joy. I can't tell you whether it's good for you or not."

"It's not good for me, it's not what I want, but I won't let someone else control it. I won't let my own feelings control it. Oh dear, sounds positively sick."

Bedelia just refilled their glasses once again.

"Should I bring you more oysters from that little place in the Inner Harbour?" Hannibal asked.

"Oh, I'd love that."

They sat in silence for some time and then Hannibal left, politely.

*

Alana called on his way home. "Wanna do something this evening?" She asked, playful and soft. Compliant. She'd think it impolite to challenge him and he'd think it impolite to insult her delicate black and white sensibilities.

Interesting, wasn't it, how everyone decided that it was the autistic that couldn't make out the subtleties, yet in his experience, it was only the autistic, particularly Will, who saw the subtleties only too well, better than most.

Hannibal apologised and told Alana he wanted to talk to his mother. Just as he expected, she backed off, immediately suspicious of him. After all, why would a man in his late forties want to have a conversation with his mother when he had a younger woman at hand?

Hannibal briefly envied Will his ability to envision things. He'd have loved to see Freud smirking at him, Jewishly.

*

Speaking of Jewishness, Will greeted his dogs, thanked Alana and asked for some space.

Alana, being unable to comprehend that someone would get over her so easily, took her sweet time getting her car started.

Suddenly the music began. It was so loud it seemed to shake Will's house.

If it keeps on raining

Levee's going to break

Alana left her car and returned to peek into Will's windows. Will was swaying and dancing in the middle of his living room and amongst his elated dogs, wearing nothing but boxer briefs and a tank top.

Mean old levee taught me to weep and mourn, Lord

It's got what it takes to make a mountain man leave his home

Alana called Hannibal.

"Alana?"

"I'm sorry to bother you, but… Will isn't well. He's dancing half naked to Led Zeppelin."

"Seems very healthy to me."

"Why would he be dancing?"

"He's healthy, back home, has his dogs with him. I must apologise, Alana, there's a significant time difference between Baltimore and Rome, and I'd hate to wake my mother up."

"Oh, sure, go have fun with your mother," Alana said bitterly. She didn't mean to, but in her experience men in their forties didn't have good relationships with their mothers and it suited her just fine.

Will switched to *Since I've Been Loving You* .

*

"My dear, my pride, my firstborn," Simonetta Lecter greeted Hannibal. She was holding her phone all wrong, letting Hanninal see her pearls and neck and double chin, but not her clever, dear face and young, mischievous eyes.

"Tilt your phone a bit, mama."

"Oh… like that? Did I show off my double chin again?"

"You did and it's fine."

"You good boy. How are you? How's your darling Will?"

"He's not my darling Will," Hannibal reminded. He looked at the mirror in his bedroom. He was impeccable, good enough to make his mother proud, not that she needed a reason.

"No, dear, you may not be his darling Hannibal, but he's your darling Will. You're generous like that. How is he?"

She wasn't mocking, she wasn't pitying him. She offered him a chance to be able to be humorous about it all, without denying him his heartbreak.

"He's fine. He's back home. Drove him there myself." He paused.

"Oh, love, what have you done now?" She asked in that voice she'd use when Hannibal climbed higher than was wise and she had to climb there, pearls and all, and help him down. Anatol Lecter had always been afraid of heights.

Hannibal snapped in half. "Fucked Alana. Fucked her a lot, and…"

"Oh, darling. Oh, what are you doing to yourself? You're not a whore, love, so why would you settle for the next best thing?"

"Because it's what's available. Marcus Aurelius? Can't change the circumstances, change the attitude."

"He was a lonely old man, Hannibal. The last thing I want for you is to live up to some old stoic ideals. Unless it's what you want." Simonetta raised an eyebrow.

"It's not what I want. She… you know her."

"I saw her pictures. You were so proud of her. Did she offer you… comfort and affection?"

"Dirty words." Hannibal looked at his mother, beseeching and lost.

"I wish I had killed her, my son. I wish I had come with you. It's of little consequence now… And I'm a bad woman, but any way you can get your revenge is good by me."

Hannibal sighed. There she was, his almighty mother, having failed him just once.

"Talk to me," he asked.

"We were all happy for Robert," she said. Oh, she hated it, hated admitting to having failed her dear, her pride, her firstborn, but she'd do it for him, because at the end of the day, she was the best woman Hannibal had ever known. "He married someone much younger and so drastically different, but he settled down. She seemed clever and polite. An aristocrat too. Us inbreeders love us a good aristocrat, don't we?

"And you were so eager to go to Paris, to see the world, to escape your home that had grown too small for you.

"Who'd have known she'd see you, see how sensitive and smart you were and twist it… She was lonely, she was bored, I know it. But she went and tried to shape you according to her own dreams and desires. I still think she married Robert to rebel against her family. Theirs was a mutual rebellion and I do love a good rebellion. In books.

"You were lonely there, you were lost, you needed a friend. Not a young aunt who wanted to show you how brilliant she was. I don't like women who show off via younger relatives. Austen would have agreed with me.

"The point, my darling, is that I failed you."

"No, that's not the point," Hannibal whispered.

"I'm afraid I can't speak of the point, Hannibal. She touched you when you weren't ready, she stalled you… Stalled the wild, beautiful river that you are. I brought you into this world to shape the banks, not to let the banks shape you. She didn't shape you. She abused you but she didn't shape you. Do your worst, Hannibal. The world owes you."

"I love you, mother."

"And I love you, Hannibal. If all parties are willing, I see no problem with you being naughty. Do your worst. I forgive you."

They kept talking, but mostly about Mischa and another sword Hannibal had acquired for her.

*

Will woke up one morning, about a week after his discharge from the hospital.

There was a stately woman by his bed. She was dressed in an old-fashioned manner, just like Hannibal, but even more old-fashioned. She wore pearls. Her face was a bit saggy, but her eyes, oh, they'd light the deepest night.

"Ehm… hello?" Will sat up.

"Sorry for bursting in like that. I'm not good with waiting. Hello, Will. I'm Simonetta Sforza Lecter. Do be quiet. My boys will be here any moment. They must be worried sick about me getting an Uber and escaping them. Life's no fun without a good scare, is it?"

Will laughed heartily. "You're safe here. Coffee?"

"Oh, do your worst. Hannibal told me you make the most deplorable coffee ever."

"That I do!" Will said proudly. "I'm in my underwear."

"And?" Simonetta squinted at him. "I'll have you know I love my Anatol dearly and I have a son. Make that coffee before Hannibal storms in as if he had woken up like this, all chiseled and handsome, and make us some better coffee."

"It's a good tradition, an aristocrat enjoying the bare necessities." Will hopped off the bed and rushed to the kitchen.

"Indeed. Your dogs are quite useless, you know. A few chunks of Hannibal's homemade sausage and they were ready to stage a coup for me."

"That's wise of them," Will replied.

"Oh, I do like you so much."

Will grinned at her. He liked her a lot as well.

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

> Alana bashing. A lot of it. She's the Caroline Bingly of this story. Very important but hateful

Will watched Simonetta Sforza Lecter daintily raise one of Will's many chipped cups to her lips and blow at the coffee. Her presence alone made it clear that she was royalty, she made a house into a castle by being in it, she made Will's faulty ceramics into the finest porcelain by holding it in her hands; her pearls must have been a family heirloom, but she'd wear a cheap plastic copy with just as much poise and grace.

Her dress was made of grey cashmere and, to Will's untrained eye, looked like something out of *The Great Gatsby* and simultaneously a very posh potato sack, but she wore it as if it had cost even more and could be worth a book written about just this piece of fabric… She was trying to be subtler, to appear less poised and royal. Will thought back to Hannibal's impeccable suits and neckties that made clashing patterns into a work of art, and realised, with melting fondness, where that trait had come from.

"Hannibal is rarely wrong. This coffee is indeed a complete and utter fungus." She made a herculean effort to suppress her wince.

"Fungus?" Will asked.

"Oh, I'm sorry. See, I have a mouth on me, and my dear Anatol had come up with an ingenious suggestion to replace all the curse words with something more child friendly once Hannibal was born. I meant to say it's a fuck up par excellence." She kept sipping on it all the same.

Will laughed. "You don't need to drink it."

"That would have been rude. I'm not that easily broken, you know."

"I'm tempted to try and make you breakfast," Will said.

"Don't test my limits, Will. Oh, do you prefer Mr Graham?"

"Perish the thought."

She hummed approvingly. "Names, as you know, have tremendous power, and I prefer addressing people by their first names, since one should always strive to make one's name enough of a reference. Like Hamlet, Beyonce or Hannibal." She smiled. She could have led an army with that smile, she could have sent a person to their welcomed death…

"It doesn't help when one has a family name to uphold, but it does inspire me to try and make everyone forget there have been other Sforzas and Lecters." She cast a meaningful look on the fat book on the history of Milan on Will's bed that was smothering an equally fat book on the history of Lithuania.

Will raised an eyebrow.

"Both of those are quite decent, I must say, as far as American studies on the subject go. If I may, I'd recommend you to learn Italian and Lithuanian and read some authentic resources. Hannibal, no doubt, will be eager to teach you. That's what friends are for, isn't it?" She asked innocently and omnisciently.

Will adored her. She knew too much, she knew everything, and any person other than Will wouldn't have been able to notice it.

"I think a friend can teach everything except perhaps phonetics." Will slurped his coffee because he could and because it was hot.

Simonetta grinned at him. "Syntax too must be firmly banished from friendship, I believe. Discussing all those *positions* in a sentence might get awkward."

"Depends on the position, I suppose." Will shrugged. "However, being a friend is an important position and important role. It might not define every sentence but the sentences defined by friendship are precious, while those of the romantic quality might restrict one's freedom of expression."

Simonetta couldn't smile any wider, so she laughed. It was quiet and restrained, a cackle more than anything. She was indulging him, he understood, and she indulged him because he amused her on a deeply personal level. Even being her jester would have meant being honoured and respected. She'd listen to him and appreciate the certain *je ne sais quoi* of his manners without trying to humiliate him.

"As far as I understood, Hannibal's paramour is a mutual friend. Can we talk about girls, Will?" She batted her eyelashes. Oh, her dear Anatol had to be some old smitten fool and also wise enough, apparently, to have recognised her spirit and submitted to it most willingly. She wasn't one to abuse her power, and she'd abuse that power when it came to someone like Jack or any other toxic presence that managed to survive in her vicinity.

"Alana is a good psychiatrist, but I'm not fond of those. She's beautiful, but I think you already know it and find it of no consequence."

They exchanged knowing looks.

"I'm not trying to shame you or guilt trip you. Believe it or not, I'm quite alright with Hannibal being rejected a few times. It builds the spirit, don't you think?" She didn't wait for an answer. "Still, I'd rather he'd found himself a beard who'd be less… conventional. A fat girl with an obscure degree and a penchant for anarchy would have suited us all better. Fortunately, Hannibal thinks Alana isn't ready to meet us. Early days and all."

Simonetta's face promised Alana something along the lines of being treated like Napoleon in Russia.

"I doubt that Alana deserves your wrath. She can't help being smart or pretty after all," Will argued.

"See, Will, a smart woman would have known she's being cast in the role of a beard. A smart woman wouldn't have found your dancing unhealthy. Oh, did I say it outloud? Deepest apologies." Simonetta looked anything but apologetic.

Will gaped. "Turns out, she spied on you after your discharge from the hospital. My congratulations on your speedy and complete recovery, by the way. She called Hannibal and warned him about you being unhealthy."

"That's Alana." Will sighed.

"Again, a smart woman wouldn't have forced a masterpiece of knot theory into a Pythagorean shape. Pythagoras was one mean bean."

"You mean bastard? You didn't even say that in front of the kids?"

"Don't judge me. Kids tend to repeat the most unexpected things. I wouldn't want Mischa to call her trainer a bastard." Simonetta glared.

"Perish the thought."

"Don't repeat yourself, Will, you can do better."

Will stared at her and then burst out laughing.

"Far better," Simonetta praised.

Both of them heard an approaching car.

"Oh, it seems my plot has been discovered." Simonetta stood up and washed her cup. "I won't apologise for anything that's about to happen, but be prepared."

Will kept sitting, listening to the eager voices from the outside.

"It's unnecessary," Hannibal argued.

"It's pretty damn necessary," a young female voice replied. "She's made an entrance and I want one too."

"Why would you meddle in your mother's plans, I have no idea," said another male voice, presumably Simonetta's dear Anatol.

Will's dogs tensed. Simonetta tsked at them and threw them more sausage.

The door flew open and in stormed a young woman holding two obviously antique swords, her hair impeccable in a bun, her eyes glowing blue. "Freeze!" She yelled.

"It's not a gun, I don't need to freeze," Will deadpanned.

"My dear, why must you make such a mess? Lower your weapons, it's not a competition."

Mischa, for it must have been her, lowered her weapons unhappily. She was followed by a tall, very skinny man with a huge moustache and smitten face. He wasn't attractive but he had been the source of Hannibal's killer cheekbones.

"I must apologise," he began.

"It's OK," Will replied. "You lot aren't helping dissuade me from the thought that it's all a hallucination."

"Hallucination?" Hannibal walked in, perfect and handsome and worried sick. "Why must you have them?" He gently cupped Will's face and tilted it this way and that. "You have no fever, you're completely healthy…"

"Hallucination?" Simonetta gasped, indignant.

"It would have been rude to tell you you were one," Will said. "Besides, any self-respecting hallucination would have told me it was very real."

Will quite enjoyed having shocked the whole Lecter clan into silence.

"I'm kidding?"

"Insolent boy," Simonetta said affectionately, then turned to her family. "I just wanted to invite Will to a family dinner in person. I was being polite and a tiny bit creepy."

"The charming bit," Will inserted. Damn it, now he remembered he was still in his underwear.

Mischa glared at her mother and Hannibal glared at Mischa and Anatol gazed at Simonetta and Simonetta winked at Will.

Oh, Will loved them all!

The dogs, having sensed his mood, rushed to greet the new guests, no doubt hoping for more sausage.

"Of course Will, you're cordially invited," Hannibal said finally. He even stopped trying to examine Will more thoroughly.

"Anatol Lecter," Hannibal's father stepped up. "Are you comfortable with a handshake? I'm very fond of those, you see, a lovely sensory experience they are, but Hannibal had explained it to me that I tend to overdo it."

Will shook his hand most happily. He felt shaken afterwards, maybe even a bit dizzy. But it was indeed lovely.

"Mischa," said Mischa and bowed. Will would have to earn her handshake. Besides, she was still holding her swords, and those were beautiful, so he didn't begrudge her.

"Should I make you all some terrible coffee?" Will asked.

"Oh, I'd love that!" Mischa exclaimed. "I never taste anything terrible!"

Will decided that his boxer briefs be damned, he'd serve the girl something terrible.

"It's admirable, really, how terrible Will makes it," Simonetta praised. "It's like drinking Lovecraft."

"I'd rather you didn't," Anatol begged.

"Oh no, my love, I'm only ever drinking you," Simonetta cooed and kissed her husband's moustache.

"They are disgusting," Mischa complained. "And so is this," she nodded at her coffee and downed it like a cheap shot of vodka. "Mind-blowing. You must be very talented. Can I pet the dogs?"

She didn't wait for Will's reply, trusted her brother with her swords and went to pet the dogs.

"Oh, this is admirably terrible," Anatol praised.

Will eventually got dressed and Hannibal made breakfast for everyone. Afterwards they went for a long walk. Mischa behaved as if they were about to be attacked any moment now, and no one paid her any mind or tried to insist that it wasn't exactly polite to wave her two sabres all around. On the contrary, her parents and Hannibal ducked with practiced ease and complimented her on her technique.

Will found himself being whisked along to a posh seafood restaurant in Baltimore. He spent the ride explaining that he was fine with seafood, his Jewishness notwithstanding.

Hannibal drove him home.

"They're a bit too much for my American friends and…"

"They're wonderful!" Will interrupted. "I'm honoured to have met them. I'm even honoured to have been stalked by your mother. Can you ask Alana to stop stalking me?" He asked.

"I'm sorry about that. I've talked to her about it, and…"

Will had a gnawing suspicion that Alana and Hannibal managed to get wet/hard by talking about him. It was hilariously sad. He wasn't the one to have created that mess, however, so he didn't say anything.

"Why do you want me to dine with your family but not Alana?" He asked instead. He knew the answer but he wanted to hear it all the same.

"She'd hate them. She'd try to fix them. I'm very fond of her, so I don't want my fondness marred by her… intolerance."

"You mentored her, Hannibal. She should know better, shouldn't she?"

"Not at the moment."

"Ah, young love."

Will exited the car and spent the night dancing to Led Zeppelin.

*

"So, how about dinner tonight?" Alana said, presumably very seductively.

"I told you, my family is here and tonight I'm dining with them."

"Hannibal, you can't be serious!"

"I don't see them often enough, and therefore, yes, I'm serious." He paused and then decided to be mean after all. "They were very eager to meet Will, so he's coming over tonight. They quite enjoy his company. Maybe we could see each other when they're entertaining him."

"They've met Will?" Alana asked, shocked. Why would anyone want to meet Will, unless they wanted to study him?

"My mother insisted on it."

"But she didn't insist on meeting me?"

"Alana, you told me yourself that you considered it too early for us to start meeting each other's families."

"Yes, but… Will? He must have caused you quite an embarrassment!" She laughed and Hannibal hated her. He hated her and wanted to come over to her place and have some perfect sex with her just to show off, just to make it clear that…

"They like him a lot, actually."

"Oh… that's very European of them."

"Why don't I come over during your lunch break? I'll bring food."

"Oh, baby, do bring food," Alana slurred.

"Would you like to meet my family, Alana?"

"I mean, I'd love to, but… We've known each for some time, but this is a kind of commitment that I'm not ready for."

He admired her honesty, yet he couldn't comprehend why she couldn't meet his family just because they were important to Hannibal. It didn't imply a marriage proposal or anything of the kind, but probably Alana had had some bad experiences in the past.

And as Hannibal made slow, tender love to her during her lunch break, he couldn't help remembering Murasaki pouting so regally and wondering how he could spend his time with someone who didn't understand him all that well, certainly not as much as *she* understood him.

Alana felt just like that, and that was why Hannibal made her come thrice. He didn't want her to feel unwanted, while he didn't want her at all.

He returned to his house and cooked. Mischa and his parents helped him and ruined a few dishes. Then Will arrived and laughed it off after immediately rushing to Hannibal's aid as he cleaned the mess and persuaded everyone to just let him cook.

"Ok, I'll occupy them by asking them for some embarrassing stories from your childhood. Even you must have some. Give me your best whisky though." Will made grabby hands.

He looked radiant. He laughed so loud Hannibal had to go and check on him.

He was sprawled on the carpet with Mischa pointing a sword at his throat and reciting some obscure medieval poetry at him. Will giggled and said he surrendered. Simonetta and Anatol looked at him fondly. Everyone was more than a bit tipsy.

During dinner Anatol said, "I'm terribly sorry about how it may sound, but… I just wanted you to know that during the war my father gathered all the local Jews and sheltered them in our dungeons. Oh, I know how it sounds! But when the Nazis came, he rushed to them and told them to hide it all and rub some coal over their faces…

"He told the Nazis that he had had it all under control and they left.

"After the war, and with the Soviets being what they were, well… May I just say that we owe our wealth and wellbeing to one of those Jews who became rich here in the States and helped us out.

"Hannibal is treating that woman's grandson."

"You my sweet Schindler bunch," Will grinned and teared up a bit.

"I like to think we're better," Anatol argued. "My family had good connections with the Jewish village nearby. It helped that we'd never been religious."

"You sweet sinner," Simonetta purred.

*

Was it very terrible with Will? I'm worried.

It was Alana's text. Hannibal wailed into his pillow and didn't know what to do. He wished Mischa would storm his room with a sword, that his mother would come and hold him, that his father would come in and hum in gentle understanding.

In the end he called Alana. "I'm sorry for such a late call, Alana, but I find it disturbing that you speak about Will in this manner. He is my friend, my family likes him. Should you insult us all like that?"

Alana apologised but inwardly she couldn't stop wondering why a man in his forties, her mentor, would think of friendship and being a son and brother as something superior or equal to a romantic relationship with Alana. She was stable, clever, modern… and they were all apparently weird. Mischa had to have been drugged up to her ears to be able to participate in the Olympics, not that Alana knew anything about those. It was hurtful all the same, to be excluded this way. It was a first for her. She couldn't remember that she hadn't wanted to meet any of them so far.

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Alana bashing. Again.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Eventually and without much prompting or provoking on Hannibal's side, Alana expressed a desire to meet Hannibal's family.

She was snuggling up to him, stunning and sated and somehow smug about it… Hannibal had never considered himself an expert in romantic love, having spent most of his adult life begrudging himself for his foolishness concerning Murasaki, but in his opinion, receiving quite mind blowing cunnilingus and a thorough fingering and a round of passionate penetrative sex wasn't a good enough reason for the receiver to feel smug. If anything, Hannibal should have felt smug. He was.

"We're getting closer and who knows when I will be able to meet them, what with their irregular visits and all." She rubbed herself against the admirable length of Hannibal's body. Hannibal wanted a shower.

"Are you admitting to being wrong, Dr Bloom?" He asked, stern but teasing.

"I wasn't wrong," Alana pinched his nipple. He had told her that he didn't like his nipples touched. "But I suppose I have underestimated our chemistry. We're both quite busy people, Hannibal, and we don't have the time for proper courting and suchlike."

Hannibal wanted to argue that he'd love to court her. He could show off and prove his superior worth to anyone who'd bother to look. He didn't.

It occurred to him that Alana had changed her opinion in the span of one week, during which he'd spent quite some time with her while his family persisted that they wanted Will to accompany them. They had seen the best of Baltimore, Mischa said, and now it was Will's turn to show them the seedier places. They had been won over by a few cups of terrible coffee.

Actually they'd just drive over to Will's and play with his dogs, walk in the woods and fish. Anatol loved fishing! Simonetta found him irresistible in Will's waders, and who would argue with her opinion?

Mischa couldn't fish at all. Will suggested she could spear a fish with one of her swords. After that Mischa decided she loved fishing, although she disabled one fish and slaughtered another well past the point of it being edible or catchable for that matter.

Will was dying with laughter as he recounted to Hannibal. "She was watching whatever was left of the poor adolescent trout with such fury… Fuck, Hannibal, she's the most beautiful person I've met, and I've met your mother!"

Did he know what he was doing to Hannibal with those stories? He must have, he couldn't have helped it, could he?

And yet, he was being nothing but a good friend. He was being a friend from a mainstream novel, the friend who'd have been the main love interest in any queer narrative. But Hannibal was dating his pale copy in the body of a woman.

There was much to say about the topic of copies, he mused, while Alana was gazing at him as if he had been her career opportunity and goal and achievement. He'd thought better of her. Were both of them ultimately so very predictable? Was he being unpredictable by being predictable? Simonetta would have some choice words about this… As it stood, however, Simonetta was only ever talking about Will.

When Hannibal told Will about it, Will blushed so hard Hannibal could hear it through the phone. "Tell her to shut up. You know how to do it politely. Do it politely. Bye, Hannibal."

*

And so there Alana was, at another family dinner. She seemed tense with Will's presence. Hannibal had told his mother that Alana might be uncomfortable with Will. He had known what she'd say and she delivered. "Well, she has to woman up a bit. He's your friend and our friend too. And a precious pretty thing too," she purred.

"Simonetta!" Anatol begged in horror.

"You're the only one for me, dearest," she waved him off. He sighed and accepted. When hadn't he?

Alana had arrived a bit earlier, intending to help or establish her older connection to Hannibal, and she was horrified by the scene that greeted her, that is, by Will and Mischa sparring in Hannibal's living room, Will cursing and grunting and looking very murderous. Mischa wasn't much better but at least she was winning.

The sight of the kitchen was even worse. Anatol was helplessly trying to just cut the vegetables and Simonetta was sipping her wine and lazily encouraging her husband while sending apologetic looks to her son, who looked quite fine. Alana expected him to be madder. He wasn't.

He greeted Alana with a kiss and poured her some beer that he had brewed just for her. The introductions were made. Anatol barely paid her any mind and Simonetta gave Alana her best

predatory smile. Alana couldn't comprehend that fierce protectiveness. After all, she was a catch, wasn't she? Hannibal couldn't have done better than her.

An aperitif was served in the living room. Will looked sweaty and disheveled, so his usual self. Mischa was tight and right and bright in her tight black trousers, laced black boots, double breasted jacket and holding a long heavy cane. Her hair was tightly made. She appeared quite blissful in her sensory sartorial paradise.

She sat there cross legged, a dominatrix, a treasure, a confident young woman.

"I didn't know you've had a trauma," Alana said carefully. "Will, really, you shouldn't have worn her out like that."

Will looked quite dead, so he didn't reply, but Mischa bristled like an angry albatross chick. "Trauma? I've never had a trauma in my life!" She raised a hand at her father when he opened his mouth. "That one time I fell from a tree wasn't my fault. I wanted to climb that tree and I did, but it was Hannibal's fault that I fell."

"Fair enough," Anatol agreed.

"Was my fault through and through," Hannibal nodded, smitten and so unbearably fond. Alana loved her brothers but she didn't understand that soft indulgence.

"It's just that you're carrying a cane," she said.

"It's a sword!" Mischa pulled a hidden sword from her cane and Will ducked.

"You shouldn't wave a weapon like that." Alana gasped.

"Why shouldn't I? I know how to use it and I will use it."

"She will," Will mouthed at Alana, just as soft and indulgent as Hannibal.

Alana didn't know what he was doing there.

Hannibal offered Alana his arm when he deemed the dinner ready. Will escorted Mischa, or rather Mischa escorted Will.

Simonetta and Anatol looked very much in love and talked in low voices in Lithuanian.

"So, Hannibal told me you're a count," Alana told Anatol once everyone was seated. Hannibal had gone to fetch the food. "How does it work in this day and age?"

Anatol looked at Alana as if he had just noticed her. He might have.

"It works just fine in Great Britain," Simonetta replied. Why would anyone address Anatol, who was so obviously uncomfortable being asked obvious questions, when Simonetta was right there, ready to wipe the floor with whoever dared to ask said questions? "However, since both our home counties are republics, our titles are entirely obsolete." She swirled her wine. "Still, we both consider our titles a cherished and treasured part of our identities,

therefore they're solely for the bedroom, aren't they, dearest count?" She covered Anatol's hand with hers.

Anatol raised Simonetta's hand to his lips. "Indeed they are, my beloved duchess."

"As far as porn names go, those are actually pretty great," Will remarked. "Short, meaningful and dignified."

Alana opened her mouth to chide Will, but Hannibal came in with food.

"Beef Stroganoff in cashew sour cream with mashed potatoes made with coconut cream," he explained and placed a plate in front of each person.

"What an interesting choice!" Alana praised.

"Will observes kashrut, but Mischa does love her beef Stroganoff," Hannibal said, taking his seat.

"It's a bit unfair," Alana said. "Will could have brought his own food and avoided forcing us all into his dietary restrictions."

"Why? It's wicked!" Mischa said.

Simonetta sent Alana a murderous look. "And why should Will accommodate our quite unrestricted diet? He's a guest, and we must accommodate him. It's basic courtesy."

Will didn't say a thing but he appeared to be very uncomfortable for a moment, until Simonetta took his hand. She didn't say anything but there was an unspoken agreement between them. Will smiled at her.

"What were you talking about?" Hannibal asked. "I heard some porn mentioned," he grinned mischievously.

"It's nothing," Alana said.

"It's everything!" Simonetta argued. "Will said that count and duchess were quite fine porn names."

Alana looked at Hannibal beseechingly. Hannibal hummed.

"Cunt and fucktress," Anatol offered suddenly and giggled.

"What would your porn name be?" Hannibal asked Mischa instead of ordering everyone to be graceful and polite.

"Morning sword," Mischa said with confidence. "Yours?"

"Obviously Honey Ball," Hannibal replied.

"Will?" Simonetta asked.

"Iron Will," Will decided.

"I think I'd love our porn names to be Anatol and Simonetta," Simonetta mused. "Our own names should speak for themselves." She cast a meaningful look towards Will.

"Let's talk about something else," Alana said, supposedly in encouragement.

"Is my son so bad in bed that you can't bear even talking about sex?" Simonetta asked, as unapologetic as any glorious old lady.

"Interestingly, Talmud has quite opposite opinions about sex," Will informed. "For example, rabbi Eliezer, if I'm not mistaken, was reported by his wife to fuck her *as if possessed by a demon* , dressed, with her dressed as well and doing nothing besides working very hard towards more little rabbis. He and some other quite marginal rabbis insisted that any form of sex that wasn't… well, *that* , was sinful. On the other end of the spectrum we have rabbis who think that whatever works for both parties is fine."

"And what is their conclusion?" Anatol asked.

"Oh, see, in Talmud, they're not big on conclusions. The best talmudic dispute is the one that remains unresolved. We have accounts of two or more opinions and everyone thinks for themselves." He shrugged. "At least it is so in the liberal denominations."

Everyone nodded in understanding.

"Will," Alana said in warning.

"What? I'm quoting Talmud!"

"I don't think anyone needs your… Jewish propaganda." Alana silently begged Hannibal for some support but he appeared to be quite invested in the conversation.

"Could you recommend a good book on sex in Judaism?" Simonetta asked, unbeknownst to Alana, saving the situation that wouldn't have needed saving without Alana's presence.

" *Carnal Israel* by Daniel Boyarin. Amazing book. Wanked my way through high school and the first years of college to it," Will said surely. Alana couldn't recognise him. He barely paid her any attention and talked about sex as if he had had any right to some!

"Ok, I'm buying it," Mischa informed, suddenly on the phone in the middle of a meal. And Hannibal didn't even say a word! Last time someone dared touch their phone during one of Hannibal's dinner parties, Hannibal banned them from his house. "What's *Socrates and Five Fat Rabbis* ?"

"Another great book of his, about the overlap between the classic Greek philosophy and early rabbinical thought," Will said. "It all happened around the same time, so…"

"It couldn't have happened around the same time," Alana said, rolling her eyes.

"We're a pretty ancient people, Alana," Will informed without looking at Alana. "See the basics of the Socratic dialogue and Talmudic dispute… Well, they're pretty similar." He shrugged. "In my Jewish opinion, the rabbis are far better. There's no agenda other than the glory of our creator, blessed be They."

"They?" Alana raised an eyebrow. No way some Jewish elders were more woke than anything Alana had learned in her Sunday school classes.

"Well, Elohim is a plural, in Hebrew. The pronoun הוא is both masculine and gender neutral in Hebrew. Also, the Orthodox Jews wouldn't say it so easily."

"Perhaps neither should you," Alana said.

"Why shouldn't I? They're my Lord and I love Them. And no matter what They love me as long as I remain my contrarian, argumentative self." Will stuffed his face with some beef Stroganoff and shrugged. Again.

"Doesn't sound much like a Lord to me," Alana knew how to shrug too.

"Hey, my Lord is your Lord's alleged father," Will warned.

"It shows," Alana sneered.

"I hope it does," Will replied.

Hannibal served the dessert. It had no dairy in it and Alana decided she didn't like it one bit. Why couldn't she eat what she liked just because this sweaty mess was there?

"I still can't understand, my dear, why you're so opposed to a conversation about sex," Simonetta insisted and Hannibal didn't stop her. Why wouldn't he put his lover above his mother while said mother abused every notion of a polite conversation Alana had ever had? "Haven't you seen Hannibal's dining room art of choice?" She winked at Hannibal and Hannibal winked back at her. He winked at his mother! He wasn't as healthy as Alana had thought.

Everyone looked at Hannibal's dining room art of choice, that is a swan going down on Leda.

"This is art!" Alana argued. "It symbolises gluttony and…"

"It is here to provoke, Alana," Hannibal explained.

"It's interesting, though," Will opened his mouth again. "You don't see any sex in it because it's art. It makes me reconsider my people's stance on representative art. If you represent something instead of experiencing it, it gets a bit diluted, doesn't it?"

Hannibal nodded. "Susan Sontag has a wonderfully clever essay along the same lines, about photography."

"Exactly!" Will waved his fork and Mischa ducked. "Being so preoccupied with preservation, one fails to get a full experience of an event."

"It must be equally true about sex," Alana said.

"A valid argument," Simonetta praised, but Alana's triumph didn't last. "Although I can see how some stuffy old men in the French Academy would reduce that painting to some metaphor and fail to notice that a woman is about to be eaten out by a swan… Oh, that beak must be a wonder!"

"I'll grow a beak for you, love," Anatol swore.

"Oh, don't bother, darling, your big old nose is just as good," Simonetta reassured.

"Disgusting," Mischa sighed.

"Precisely!" Alana exclaimed.

"Oh no, not what you meant!" Mischa rushed to argue. "Just… you know, they're so in love and I feel like a third wheel here. I mean, it must imply I need to finally date that Chinese fencer…" Mischa looked very pensive.

"It implies that you were made in love," Simonetta assured her girl.

"Yeah, that much I know. I want some of that love for myself… Oh, she's so graceful with a sword!" Mischa turned dreamy. "I want to boast about fucking her with my sword hilt some twenty years from now."

"It will be fine, my dear girl," Anatol promised.

"Nothing would live up to that story of yours," Mischa snapped her fingers.

"Oh, you mean the Sorbonne morgue one?" Anatol asked, blushing just a bit.

"Yeah! No one could live up to it." Mischa sulked.

"Make a morbid joke about Holocaust," Will recommended.

"I can't, I'm not a Jew!" Mischa complained.

"Jokes about Holocaust?" Alana gasped.

"Sure! We have plenty of those. For example, there were those warnings at the entrance of gas chambers telling the prisoners to *watch their step* . Not even a joke." Will sighed and downed a glass of some fine wine. Hannibal immediately refilled his glass.

"No, that's too morbid," Simonetta decided. "Me pegging Anatol in the Sorbonne morgue was just some naughty fun."

"The best day of my life," Anatol sighed dreamily.

Luckily for Alana, the entire company decided it was the time to move back to Hannibal's living room.

"You and Anatol should dance!" Simonetta exclaimed. "Something naughty and modern and classic!"

"Klezmer!" Will said.

"Oh, yes, please."

And that was how Alana witnessed Hannibal and Anatol *slaying* it to a song of Will's choice. It was in Russian but somehow Will translated it in a boring academic voice.

Whores have curly hair

Because all respectable people spend all their money on whores

"I remembered!" Will suddenly announced. "My French is shit but that naughty poem by Parny? About Leda?" He frowned in concentration.

Bientôt ses baisers moins timides

Sont échauffés par le désir ;

La volupté la fait gémir ;

Et le dernier cri du plaisir

Échappe à ses lèvres humides.

Hannibal smiled so lovingly at him then. Will's French was abysmal to Alana, that is to say, it was Creole French. Somehow Hannibal and Simonetta teared up at it.

"Yes, I love that poem," Simonetta whispered. Anatol kissed her ear. Hannibal was being smitten with Will, his messy French, his ability to remember a poem by Parny.

Alana didn't know who Parny was. She was pretty certain they had drunkenly mispronounced porn.

In the end, though, Will left to take care of his dogs. Mischa, despite being in her twenties, cried and wept so terribly. She was ugly in her weird grief.

Instead of reproaching her, however, Hannibal and Will hugged her and Will promised that she could come any time; he reminded her that the key was under the doormat, that certainly Hannibal could help with the paperwork that would make Buster a certified service dog, to which Hannibal eagerly agreed; that Mischa would be a great dog mom; that she was the best anyway.

But afterwards Hannibal pushed Alana into the nearest wall and asked her to stay the night.

"I have nothing to wear," Alana said demurely.

"I'll find something for you," Hannibal promised.

Alana couldn't reject him. He was good with his mouth and the rest was of no importance. She wouldn't miss a red flag, would she? She wasn't that easy or stupid.

So she rode him and snuggled up to him.

"Will was a disaster, though," she said out of the blue. "You shouldn't let him trick your family like that."

"He didn't trick them. I suppose they are just too weird for you," Hannibal said.

"European," she corrected, unaware of the depth of the grave she was digging for herself. "It's unhealthy. He's a friend, nothing else. He shouldn't behave like that. You should put him in his place."

Alana couldn't realise that she was currently occupying Will's place. "Feels so naughty, having sex with you with your parents sleeping next door." She giggled.

"I doubt they're sleeping," Hannibal commented.

He was thinking of mirrors and copies. He was thinking of how neither he nor Murasaki found it wrong having an affair while he wasn't ready and she was married. And now Alana found it *naughty* to have consensual sex with Hannibal's parents next door.

Alana was thirsty so she walked down for a glass of water. As she passed Hannibal's parents' room she heard loud moans and some porn names being wailed into the night.

She returned to Hannibal. "Seems your parents are having sex," she said.

Hannibal was reclining on the bed, deadly handsome, all golden skin and a tome of Parny on his lap.

"I hope so," he said. "That bed is custom made."

"They're old… It feels so strange." She lay beside Hannibal.

"Strange? Why would it be? They're deeply in love." Hannibal turned a page and held Alana close.

"But like… they're old."

"I thought I taught you better, Alana. Sex doesn't have to be tied to libido. Sometimes it's just a way to express one's devotion and care."

"Is that what you're doing?" She asked playfully.

Hannibal kissed her but didn't fuck her into the bed. He fell asleep next to her.

In the morning when Alana walked down again for yet another glass of water she found Simonetta in her nightgown making coffee.

The older woman smiled and prepared two cups of espresso which she swiftly carried away.

Alana couldn't understand it.

And then Mischa was up and whining about Will's dogs so Hannibal left Alana to drive his sister to Will's while their parents enjoyed some morning sex, according to the sounds.

Alana didn't understand it. Hannibal should have stayed with her, people over sixty had to give up everything to take care of their unruly child and Will had to have died lonely and undesired as befitted an unstable autistic person who couldn't know what was good for him.

And instead she had another cup of coffee with Hannibal's parents who didn't care all that much…

To anyone else it would have been a clear sign of being unwanted but Alana couldn't even imagine being unwanted.

She made such a sacrifice by making breakfast for everyone only to eat by her lonesome.

Hannibal didn't return until noon and when he did, he was too busy with his annoying sister's breakdown over some mutt of Will's…

Alana liked Will's dogs but that was too much.

She tried to be stern with Mischa only to be snapped at by her and to be told by Hannibal to leave immediately. How come he wanted to comfort his sister and no one else? Alana decided she would have to teach Hannibal a lesson. It had never occurred to her that Hannibal's family was just as *unstable* as Will. Hannibal wasn't a Jew after all.

Chapter End Notes

Those books are totally real. Carnal Israel I can't recommend enough, but Boyarin is an amazing thinker in general.
The poem by Parny is called Leda and it's pure delight. Pushkin refers to Parny as tender and he's totally accurate.

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

> CW: Hannibloom sex, Hannibal is triggered and please tell me if I should add dubious consent to the tags. Also, Hannibal has violent thoughts. I think I'm channeling some of my frustration with Alana, but boy, do I hate her.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

To Will, loneliness had never been a problem. He was quite happy to see a new article in *The Atlantic* that proclaimed that introverts were currently helping the rest of the world to understand that the desire to socialise, contrary to popular belief and established studies, wasn't the defining human trait. Will considered himself relatively human with a bit of a dog, a manatee and an occasional twisted tree mixed in. Still, he was mostly human, and being mostly human, he still preferred to be by himself with his dogs as the best company.

Having met the Lecters, Hannibal reluctantly and his family with what could have passed for excitement but was instead comfort and surprising lack of anxiety, Will had discovered for the first time in his life that company could be pleasant. He'd never believed in the whole *until you meet the right person* shtick for it wasn't about a person. It was about behaviour.

Sitting with Mischa on the porch and doing nothing other than staring into the middle distance or rocking together (they didn't mean to rock together but they would always sync) was comforting, as was listening to her endless stories about her swords, sparring with her (she was a formidable teacher, gently impersonal, lacking any kind of imposing behaviour that most of Will's teachers had possessed) or singing Torah to her. Through her Will had rediscovered the joy of praying, of davening, and she, with her quick mind and good memory, would hum along to his prayers. It felt like such a primal, basic Jewish experience, standing in the open and praising the Lord. It made Will feel his three fathers and six mothers deep in his blood, the throbbing history of his people rushing through his veins and connecting him all the way back to Abraham and Sara, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Leah, Rachel, Bilcha and Zilpa. His rabbi was absolutely enamoured with Mischa as well and treated the older Lecters like royalty without making a fuss. Anatol even told the story of the Lecter's sheltering the Jews during the war one Saturday for the study group.

At first the Lecters had intended to stay for just a few weeks, but Mischa had a long break between the New York event and the next competition, and they were eager to stay and get to know Will better. Will decided he liked the prospect a lot. He used his treasure trove of paid leave, that it had never occurred to him to indulge in and enjoyed the free time and having a family.

He felt safe and protected when he was sitting with Mischa on the porch while Simonetta and Anatol played chess inside. No one ever bothered anyone, yet no one felt distant.

Will didn't sense any pressure from Simonetta to change his mind and make haste to marry Hannibal or at least go out with him, and that was perhaps the most precious part of the entire experience. They had no expectations for him. They just liked him.

As for Hannibal and Alana, Will would smirk sometimes, pleased with himself for not being jealous of either of them and puzzled about the new, mean side of Alana that she, being very jealous herself and oblivious to it, hadn't previously revealed. Will felt proud of himself for resenting her kindness at the best of times. His instincts hadn't failed him. They never had after all.

In short life was in fact rather wonderful.

Only now Will was being reminded of his more prolific experience of life as a set of traps because Alana was standing right in front of his house, looking sad and heartbroken, but bugger that, Will and Mischa had been enjoying some therapeutic dog brushing.

Mischa had come on her own, growling and complaining about her parents' locking themselves in their bedroom early in the morning and Hannibal having been very insistent and persuasive about Mischa driving to Will on her own, if she had wished to see him, and hating driving and being eager to cuddle with Buster.

It had been both difficult and easy to let go of the dog but when Will had decided to give him to Mischa, it had appeared like the rightest thing to do. He had been training him as a service dog ever since, with Mischa's assistance of course.

Mischa saw Alana, her jaw went rigid and very Lecter. Then she rose to her feet and stormed into the house huffing and grumping.

"That's some show," Alana said awkwardly.

"You insulted her a week ago, Alana," Will reminded her, standing up as well.

Sparring with Mischa, Will could finally let his feral inner beast out in an elegant manner and legal setting. It somewhat helped that Hannibal would gaze at him with pride and hunger if he had a chance to witness their fights.

Right now however, Will was feeling very murderous, had no sword at hand and a witness in the house, not that Mischa would betray him, but why put her through it?

"Insulted her? How have I insulted her? She was behaving in an immature and childish way and…" Alana looked aside, suddenly furious.

"Don't you dare talk about my girl like this," Will growled, slowly descending the steps and approaching Alana. She seemed rather shocked by this display, but then her face softened, took on that condescending look that Will hadn't recognised for what it was before. "You're in love with her? It's wonderful!" She reached out to touch Will's arm but fortunately thought better and retreated.

"What? How the fuck… She's my girl, my sister, my friend!" Will was sputtering and maybe even spitting.

"Oh, Will," Alana sighed. "Entering into a relationship with someone like Mischa Lecter would have been unwise, what with her being as she is and you being…"

"What? Unstable?"

"You are both quite… irregular people."

"Just say crazy. I'm not Hannibal, I prefer rudeness to false politeness."

"Will, she's not your sister. They are not your family. You can't insinuate your way into a family just because you like them."

Will felt ashamed, more out of habit than anything else, but oh, that was the glory of his new life and connections! His brain immediately caught up on how unnecessary, how empty that shame was, and instead he felt euphoric, free, *protected and belonging.* "I haven't done anything of the like, Alana. Why are you here?"

"I'm worried about you. I'm worried about Hannibal. You're a clever man, Will, more than you probably realise, and I've come to think that your presence allows him to be more indulgent towards his loved ones than it is reasonable and dismiss his meaningful adult connections."

"By those you mean you, I assume," Will snapped.

"Yes, me, and his other friends, his colleagues. It's unbecoming of someone like him to be so close with his birth family. It's unhealthy. But with you there with him, with your influence and your manipulations, of which you're unaware, I'm certain, he somehow finds it appropriate to wink to his mother, let his sister have her way with him and…"

"Go away, Alana. Never talk to me like that again. It's for your own good."

"Are you threatening me?" She looked scared, Will was happy to notice.

"I am. I have an Olympic champion behind that door and she's brought me some fine swords to play with. I'm getting really good."

He turned on his heels and walked to his house.

"I was eavesdropping," Mischa informed him firstly.

Will smiled at her.

"You're totally my brother," she said calmly.

"I know. Hug?"

"No, thank you. I'm too emotional at the moment."

"Yes, I don't want one either. Should we go and cut some wood to get the tension out?" He suggested.

"Oh, fungus, please."

They went into the woods, found an old fallen tree and slaughtered it to its second death, along with a few bugs, some slime moulds and terrified fungi. Then Will told Mischa all about the bugs, slime moulds and the fungi. It felt very therapeutic. "We should recommend it to Hannibal," Mischa decided.

"Hannibal would look good with a sword," Will agreed. Hannibal would look good with anything and Will liked having him in his life. It was a simple and somehow very important truth of his new life.

"Nah, Hannibal prefers a knife fight any day. Or a fist fight."

"Why, then I should duel him. I'm good at krav maga."

"It's unseemly to boast," Mischa said sternly. "But there should be one Lecter you can, you know, push on their back and kick their arse… Just don't hit his face. I'm fond of it. Maybe he could do with just one testicle?"

Will laughed so hard Mischa wanted to call an ambulance or Hannibal. Will encouraged the latter just to hear Hannibal's reaction when Mischa inevitably informed him how he could do with just one testicle.

Hannibal hummed into the phone. "I could do with fewer testes, my dear, but what if I deprive Will of his?"

"Nah, not touching Will. He's my new brother."

Will could hear Hannibal's deep inhale. "Well, then I'll wait for a few more years."

"Yes, that's wise."

"Oh, come home you two, I need to feed you."

*

During the week after Alana's disastrous meeting with Hannibal's family, she didn't answer his messages or return his calls. Hannibal had stopped trying to contact her after one day, but she'd never reached back and Hannibal wasn't certain how he felt about it.

He didn't want a messy, plebeian break up. He hadn't done anything wrong. He hadn't promised her his hand in marriage or his heart for a transplant. He didn't have to protect her

from his family, seeing as they didn't openly attack, and as for the subtle attacks, Alana hadn't noticed them and actually had them coming.

But he wanted that farce of a relationship to be as perfectly tailored as his suits. It had to be perfect, impeccable, irreproachable. He had to convince himself that he could in fact have a meaningful romantic relationship no matter what. It was a controlled experiment and an important experience. What had started off as an attempt to make Will jealous and overcome Murasaki, grew into an entirely different animal. If Alana wanted to end their affair, she'd have to do it on her own, and Hannibal would do nothing to steer her either way, nor would he marry her of course.

He was angry with her for treating his sister with arrogance and disdain, but exactly because of that anger he wanted Alana to remain by his side. She'd have to change her opinion or behaviour. She'd have to love Mischa and Simonetta and Anatol because how could anyone fail to do so? If he had to break Alana's heart and bend her mind, he'd do it. She'd love the Lecters and she'd miss them when she lost them.

It pleased him to think that his psychological warfare jumped into existence because of one careless remark.

He was just finishing everything up in his office when he heard a knock.

Perhaps one of his patients had left something behind? No, it couldn't have been so. Hannibal would have noticed, wiped the object with alcohol and put it into a zip lock. He wasn't keeping those around in all sizes for anything else.

He walked to the door and opened it to bashful, sad and tenderly sulking Alana. He opted for playfulness. "Do you have an appointment?" He asked.

She grinned. Had Hannibal been a lesser man, he'd have grown into a very misogynistic pig. Was being so changeable in such an unconvincing way a part of female empowerment? Being called changeable and unfaithful and embracing it? Hannibal thought that had Alana been all that indeed, he'd have admired her more.

"Do you have beer?" She asked, equally playful. At least that was honest.

"For you, always." He gestured for her to come in. She stopped by him, close and intimate, eyes on his lips. "Missed me?" He whispered.

"Missed you so much," she sighed and held him. He held her back, caressed her hair. It was nice hair after all. "I'm sorry for my childish behaviour, I was so upset. We should have talked, I should have answered…"

"Shh, it's alright."

Murasaki did that too. Murasaki too was unaware of doing it, of playing and preying on his protectiveness, his desire to provide and cherish.

Alana let go of him, thankfully, and Hannibal went to fetch her her beer.

"I've been to Will's," she said, again sullen. "I've come to talk to you about us, of course, but I'm afraid I'll have to talk about him and your family too." She sat down on the sofa and Hannibal sat by her side, attentive and caring. He wanted to strangle her.

He contemplated instead what to say next and set on remaining playful and just a bit cruel, but in an innocent way.

"Mischa has just called me. She was worried Will was laughing too hard." His chuckle was genuine. "Turns out Will is just as fond of martial arts as I am, and Mischa is allowing him to relieve me of one testicle."

Alana looked horrified but played along all the same. "That's a pity. I prefer you with both," she purred, putting her palm on his thigh far too close to his crotch. Protectively.

"This is an incredibly ableist thing to say, Alana. Didn't I teach you better?"

"Want to punish me?" She smiled.

"Not my kink, I'm afraid." It totally was his kink. He loved spanking and being spanked, but definitely not by Alana. He was honestly surprised she mentioned something like that. She seemed like a kind of person to belittle any kink as not normative and therefore punishable by celibacy.

"Pity," she sighed. "Although I must admit this is a very perverse fantasy."

Oh, there she was.

"Will was very… rude. He threatened me and told me I had insulted your sister a week ago. Do you think so too?"

She expected him to be appalled by Will's behaviour but instead… Oh, instead he remembered how George's older lover in Maupassant's *Bel Ami* tied a strand of her hair around the buttons of his vest, thus marking him and trying to ensure his faithfulness. His heart was made of buttons and Will's hair held them together in a chaotic, messy manner. How he yearned for him at that moment!

"I can't believe Will would actually threaten you, but of course if this is your experience, I'm appalled."

Alana relaxed a bit, so Hannibal pushed the knife harder. "I do think though, that you insulted my sister. I understand that perhaps she's not the easiest person to be around, but you had no right to chide her. My family will always come first, Alana."

"This is another matter I wanted to talk to you about. As a friend and colleague, more than a lover, I find your attachment to your birth family unhealthy."

Hannibal tilted his head and remembered his less kinky days in the Sorbonne morgue. Mentally he was dissecting Alana as he would one of the assigned corpses, only she'd be alive for all of it.

"I don't think I understand," he said.

"Hannibal, you allow your sister to snap at your partner. You allow your mother to snap at your partner. I'm not in a position to defend myself or you'll consider me rude, but… It hurt me, Hannibal. I expected you to support me, especially when it turned out that Will somehow convinced you to prepare a kosher meal, or when you let him and your parents talk about porn or Judaism, although it clearly made me uncomfortable."

She was being a textbook abuser, alienating him from the people who loved him. She was certain she was saving him, she dearly loved being a saviour. Was it an American trait, he wondered?

"I don't see how being a gracious host or a bit naughty can make you uncomfortable."

He'd gaslight anyone into a lightning. He was that good and that self-aware.

"I apologise if my family have made you feel this way. As for Will, I'm not responsible for him."

"Will isn't good for you," Alana beseeched. "He's an… unusual man, very smart and very influential. I've known him for much longer, Hannibal, and the way he sort of inserted himself into your family, indulging their unconventional habits, is frankly worrying. You allow yourself too much in his presence. I was shocked when you didn't say a word while Mischa was using her phone at the dinner table."

"She's my sister. I am in fact indulgent when it comes to her or my parents. I see how it might appear unusual to you but we have always been quite open with each other. Our parents' habit of discussing their sex life in a humorous and gentle manner is what allowed me to develop a healthy sex life myself."

"And I do appreciate it! But it can't go on!" Alana insisted. "Not if you want me in your life."

Hannibal's inner teenager, confused and lonely, was begging for his mother to walk in and choke Alana with her pearls.

"I'm certain we can find a compromise."

"I will apologise to your sister. I will be respectful to your parents. But Will…"

"He is my friend. I don't think we've arrived at that stage in our relationship where I have to pick a side. You may as well meet someone younger and more dashing, and then what will I be left with?" He teased. He had reached her bones and scraped them clean, admiring the play of red and white.

"You know me well enough to understand I wouldn't do something like that. I like Will too. We need to show him his place. He's a friend, not a family member. He thinks Mischa is his sister, he told me so himself!"

Hannibal wanted to burn the world down and conquer a few kingdoms, to do anything just to convince Will that he was worth taking a chance. That wasn't a long game though. He'd have

time for that.

"I'm very glad that Will found himself comfortable enough to consider himself a part of my family. I see no problem there. Please, Alana, I can't lose friends because you ask me to." He pouted. She'd consider it childish in Will or Mischa, but in him, she wouldn't dare. And she didn't.

"What about your older friends? You've hardly been to the opera or had a dinner party since they're here."

"Because, as I have told you, I don't see them often enough. Let us both make an effort, Alana." He leaned in to kiss her, faking neediness and warmth. "They will leave soon and Will too will be back to his teaching. There's no need for any hasty decisions while our difficulties are only temporary. Would you like to come for dinner and stay the night?"

Alana smiled and kissed him. She said she'd pack an overnight bag and come over as soon as she can. Hannibal was free to act.

He called Mischa and informed her of the recent developments, in Lithuanian. Mischa said she'd ask Will to bring the dogs along. She understood him immediately, Hannibal could hear her sneering. She promised to update their parents. Hannibal heard Will listening to Mischa's explanations, soft but just enough for Will to understand.

"Ok, turning around, what the fuck, right…"

He got it, Hannibal was sure of it. He was in. Their next of kin, their brilliant friend.

*

Alana arrived and was offered a beer. She apologised to Mischa, grabbing her hands.

"Fuck off," Mischa sneered and pulled her hands back. She stormed out and Alana could hear Will comforting her with an opportunity to pet all the dogs.

"I tried," Alana said, her lip trembling.

"Of course you did, dear," Simonetta said coldly. "Next time try not to touch anyone without their consent."

"It was a friendly gesture!"

"You're a psychiatrist," Simonetta said with the softness of a snake administering venom to its dinner. "Are you that bad?"

"Pardon?"

"I won't humiliate myself with any explanation."

And with that Simonetta left the kitchen.

Hannibal tilted his head in a silent reproach.

"What?" Alana snapped. "They're too difficult! I'm not Will, I can't tell what anyone else is thinking."

"Why don't you help me with the cooking?" Hannibal asked. He wanted her safe and soft. He wanted her vulnerable.

Without a single word or complaint, he carried the food, kosher of course, to the living room, and ate with Alana in the dining room.

Afterwards they joined the Lecters and Will.

Will was sitting on the floor between Mischa's legs, holding a big book of Italian grammar. Mischa was massing his scalp. Will looked blissful. Their parents were nowhere to be seen.

"Mom and dad went out. Mom wanted ice cream and dad obliged," Mischa explained.

"This is quite an advanced level," Hannibal remarked on Will's book.

"It is. I took to doing it instead of my morning sudoku in the bathroom and evening sudoku in bed. So I'm good." He raised his eyes at Alana, shared a look with Mischa and another with Hannibal. "I'm sorry for my behaviour, Alana, I was just too angry." And he returned to his grammar.

Then he said *Mischa is massaging my scalp* in Italian and Mischa kissed the top of his head. "We're gonna go to the Inner Harbour now and watch the sea," Will informed them.

They left.

Alana dragged Hannibal to the bedroom. He went down on her with the dedication of a porn star. She kept touching his nipples. He lifted her up and held her, standing up, showing off his strength and prowess.

She kept touching his nipples.

"Please, don't touch me there," he said. She gave him a sultry smile and kept doing it. "It's an erogenous zone, what's wrong with you?" She teased.

He fucked her harder, and she moaned and said *just like that.* She could have just asked him to fuck her harder. But why would she? Oh, Hannibal was going to ruin her forever.

Chapter End Notes

Simonetta doesn't say that Mischa is autistic bc well, Alana is a psychiatrist. None of them thinks it's a dirty word but they find it humiliating to explain themselves to her.

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

> This chapter is a cause of pride for both HHL and myself. And I swear, Alana is well and truly gone.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

In the morning Hannibal woke Alana up with soft kisses and nothing else. She rubbed herself against him, she whispered filth into his ears, although it wasn't filth in Hannibal's books since his mother had had him read de Sade and Diderot once she had deemed him ready, and she had deemed him so at the right time.

Hannibal pretended to be a grumpy, sleepy lover, turned over and even snored.

Alana sighed, tender and smug, and went downstairs.

Downstairs Mischa, wearing a very tight tank top and very tight shorts, both white, had Will pinned to the floor, where he was giggling and writhing under her, with two swords at his throat and Mischa laughing but insisting on threatening him in perfect Italian. She was also straddling him on the kitchen floor while Simonetta was making coffee for everyone and Anatol was reading a morning paper.

"Isn't it… inappropriate?" Alana asked.

"You're wearing Hannibal's yesterday shirt, dear, so… if you wanted to be appropriate, you should have stolen a fresh one," Simonetta deadpanned.

Will's dogs sat by the kitchen door and whined in worry, but they still growled at Alana.

"Enough, Mischa… enough." Will realised that Mischa was a bit too lost to the game and grasped her shoulders firmly.

Mischa froze. "It's OK," Will said. "It's OK, just enough. I'm not comfortable anymore."

Mischa cursed like a sailor, apologised like a queen and rose from Will's prostrated body.

"Let's take the dogs out," Will suggested.

He gratefully took a cup of coffee from Simonetta and led Mischa and the dogs into the yard for a run.

"Should I make breakfast?" Alana asked.

"If you want. I'm only hungry for my dear Anatol's impressive manhood," Simonetta said and dragged the quite unsuspecting Anatol away from his paper and upstairs.

Alana rolled her eyes. She could make breakfast and be a good wannabe wife, whore in the kitchen and angel in bed. She burnt the bacon and it woke Hannibal who kissed her and told her not to worry.

Will and Mischa ran in and told everyone they were going to…

"Breakfast first," Hannibal insisted. He didn't comment on Mischa's state of undress or Will's sweaty pyjamas, that is, his underwear.

In the dining room it was quiet and Alana felt more or less at home. She couldn't wait for the Lecters to depart and let Hannibal be his inhuman self. Alas, she had to go to work and leave Hannibal to the vultures of his sister and Will.

"Be good," she begged him. He just smiled at her. He had work too.

Mischa and Will decided to spar all day long and that was how Hannibal and Alana found them in the evening — messy and ravenous.

"Do you think Will's in love with her?" Alana asked Hannibal.

"Of course not. She's his sister."

"And I'm his mother," Simonetta interrupted. "Have you noticed how Hannibal is practically bursting with brotherly affection for him? Why are you still here anyway?"

"Mother, this is rude," Hannibal chided just so. Simonetta smiled at him. Oh, she knew, she knew far too well.

"Will is still here too," Alana said.

No one replied to her.

Hannibal wanted to go walk Will's dogs so the Lecters walked out and Alana decided to stay in and dream about healthier times.

She got bored pretty soon. For all the treasures of Hannibal's library, none of them could befit a square girl like her. Those were the tomes for topological people, and Alana had no idea about topology, since it didn't concern her field.

She returned to the kitchen and opened the oven where a pile of steaks was being kept warm.

Alana had always enjoyed some steak with butter so without much thought she found the butter in the fridge and put a slice of it on the top of the steak pile.

She then made an admirable effort of putting together a coleslaw. She even set the table. She even found it in herself to rejoice in the messy return of the Lecters, all loud voices and Hannibal's promise to bring more towels for the dogs.

Mischa walked into the dining room sneering and sneezing. "The smell is all wrong," she complained.

Hannibal thanked Alana with a kiss for all her effort but frowned when he noticed the strange smell too. Perhaps he'd been inhaling too much dog.

Then Will gazed at his plate and paled. "I'm sorry, there's some butter in it," he said. "I'm sorry I can't eat it. Hannibal, I'm so sorry."

Hannibal raised his eyes from his plate. "I swear I didn't add any butter. I wouldn't do it."

"Fine, I did it!" Alana confessed. "I love a steak with butter. I still can't see why we have to abide by Will's traditions while they're his own."

"You owe your traditions to mine," Will hissed. "All your Sunday school stuff… All stolen from my people!" He schooled his face. "I think I must leave. None of you had to make all that effort…"

His speech was interrupted by Simonetta dropping her plate on the floor. "So sorry about it, Hannibal, dear. I can't eat this meal, my Sforza instincts are telling me that it's poisoned."

Anatol rose to his feet, pushing his plate to the floor as well. He cast a knowing look at Hannibal. "You should know better," he spat.

Will apologised again but mid sentence Mischa dragged him away, swiping her plate to the floor as she left.

Alana watched the scene in shock and mild amusement, expecting Hannibal to shake his head or get angry, but instead when spoke, his voice was even and all deadlier for it.

"The moment I saw him I knew I wanted him and no one else." He dropped his own plate to the floor as well. "I asked him out but he told me he'd needed a friend more than a date, so I obeyed. I'd always obey him.

"You came in and offered comfort in such a manner that I supposed it would be too rude to refuse. I must admit it's one of the things I have learned from Will. Rejection is a healthy response to unwanted affection."

"Hannibal, this is childish…"

Hannibal walked out and returned with a glass container. "Take all you want," he said. "Floor or plate," he added. "It all goes to waste anyway. Will's dogs eat kosher food too, so I can't even feed them this… this." Hannibal glared at Alana. "I'm afraid our relationship cannot continue in any capacity, Alana, I'm being as clear as I can be with how angry I am with you. If you try to reach out or even mention my name in passing, I'll have your career ruined."

Hannibal stared at her, all handsome and terrifying.

"Hannibal…"

"I said, don't mention me." He swiftly collected the meat and put it into Alana's hands as he all but shoved her out of the door.

"Rude, Hannibal!" She yelled.

"Oh, please, fungus off," Mischa said from behind Hannibal. "Never come back."

Alana scurried away, holding a container full of steak in her numb hands.

"I'm sorry," Will tried to apologise.

"No, Will, it is I who has to beg for your forgiveness," Hannibal countered.

"No, you don't have to." Will stopped Hannibal. "I'm used to being an outcast. Are you?"

"I am. I am for you."

"Ok. Ok. It's a bit too much," Will resigned.

Hannibal quickly arranged a new meal, while the Lecters tortured Will with some Italian grammar.

They ate together in a companionable silence until Will raised his fork pensively and said, "I hope you don't expect any of us to believe that you're heartbroken? I've seen your heartbroken face and it's not this." He pointed at Hannibal with the fork, the precious rude boy. Hannibal grinned and raised his glass of wine.

"Bang bang, the witch is gone!" Mischa proclaimed. "If only you hadn't brought her upon us yourself, brother dear."

Hannibal made a humble face and everyone laughed.

After dinner Mischa demanded Scrabble. Turned out she had taken away Hannibal's marble Scrabble and forgot to return it or had lost it along the way. "It was a lovely sensory Scrabble," she bemoaned.

"Well, Hannibal must have paper and a few pens." Will shrugged.

For half an hour the entire family was preparing the Scrabble tiles from Hannibal's expensive cream coloured paper, then the game began.

And it was while crouching and crawling about on the floor, arranging the tiles for Mischa, Simonetta and Anatol, since they refused to do aforementioned crouching and crawling, that Will stumbled into Hannibal, raised his eyes and it clicked. That at-first-sight attraction, that immediate connection, that newly discovered capacity for love and companionship, it all fell into the most winsome and as yet undiscovered word to be put on the floor and worshipped awkwardly.

Hannibal's look was warm and heavy, Will's eyes suddenly locked on Hannibal's, their breath, for just one moment, synced, and behold, it was good.

They continued playing, no knowing looks passed between them, but the knowledge itself, it was there, certain and right, but new. It was akin to coming up with a revolutionary theory that made every little thing, each puzzle and mystery clear and comprehensible.

Eventually Simonetta and Anatol retired and Mischa followed them, thus leaving Hannibal and Will alone.

Will stretched his legs in front of the fire in Hannibal's study where they had decided to relocate. "It's been a while since it was just you and me," Will remarked.

"It has, rather," Hannibal agreed and handed Will his bourbon.

"Thank you. Should I leave you guys alone? You didn't get to spend any proper time with your family after all."

"Not because of you," Hannibal assured.

"True. Because of you, however," Will said meaningfully. "I have to admit I liked watching you playing with Alana. It seemed like a fitting revenge for her opinion of me, not the rejection, mind you. The rejection I could handle. The half arsed attempts to avoid calling me outright crazy… Well, I've come to think that I'm not crazy.

"The best part, though, is that I didn't have to lift a finger. Thank you, Hannibal. It must have been hard for you." Now, Will's eyes were far too knowing. "She triggered you, didn't she?"

Hannibal swallowed his cognac. "She did," he confessed.

"Should I spit it out or do you want to talk about it?" Will asked carefully.

"I'm not your patient, Will."

"No, you're not, but you're my friend, and for better or worse, I'm quite good at reading people… what I like the most about you, Hannibal, is that you are unreadable. You don't overwhelm me with your thoughts, you're clear as a forest lake and just as deep and dangerous."

"Spit it out then," Hannibal said. "I'm curious to discover how far into the lake you can really see." He smiled, indulgent and scared.

"She triggered you. She behaved like that aunt of yours. She's soft and pitying and entirely too self-absorbed to notice a thing. I hadn't realised it before I saw you two together, before she insulted Mischa, and I'm sure your parents as well. It felt familiar and terrifying, didn't it?"

"It did," Hannibal agreed. He couldn't take his eyes off of Will, couldn't get enough of his voice, the way his mind unraveled for Hannibal, even if it only served to hurt Hannibal more. Neither his parents, nor his sister could fully understand what he had been through, what he had felt. They were compassionate and kind and angry on his behalf, but Hannibal had been yearning for understanding, complete, twin-like, mirror-like, of himself. He had been

yearning for this messy, otherworldly, sweaty, clever man to reach into Hannibal's memory, take his hand and walk through it with him, without any need for words and explanations.

"You hoped to make me jealous. You hoped to show off, to let me see how good of a partner you could have been, even with a wrong partner. I should have looked at you and Alana and thought, oh, imagine what he's like when he has the right one."

Hannibal didn't remember moving but next thing he knew, he was kneeling in front of Will, grasping at his worn jeans and shaking with sobs, his head in Will's lap, both hidden and absolutely, utterly seen. Will didn't need to see him to understand him, Will didn't need to hear a thing.

"It's OK, baby, it's fine," Will whispered, gingerly touching Hannibal's hair and apparently liking the feeling enough to run his fingers through it more firmly.

Hannibal kept crying. He hadn't ever cried about it, he realised. He was angry, he was ashamed, he was proud, he was scared, but he'd never given himself enough freedom to grieve. He had guided so many people through similar experiences, he fostered their anger and encouraged their fury and inspired them to act, but it had always begun with them breaking down in front of him. It occurred to him that the fact of their breakdown had always been his primary success as a psychiatrist, while helping them avenge themselves and showing them how independent and strong they were had been his fierce and unbent humanity, his persistent belief that everyone had the right, nay, the duty to lash out and gouge metaphorical or literal eyes of their abusers only to forget about them afterwards and lead their lives as they saw fit.

"Do you like me because I get you?" Will asked, his own voice rather weepy and terrified.

"No, I like you, adore you, love you because you have pretty eyes," Hannibal looked up and smiled through the tears.

"And a nice arse, I hope," Will said supportively.

"Definitely a very nice arse. The best, I dare say."

Hannibal lowered his head back on Will's lap.

"Hey, Hannibal? You want a fist fight? I promise I won't harm your testicles."

That was how they ended up viciously fighting, first in the study, then down the hall, then in the living room.

Hannibal was aggressive, very strong and capable of hopping over any furniture and ducking at any given moment, while Will's style was more evasive, but then again, it gave him the upper hand, since he got enough time to observe and understand Hannibal's tactics.

Still, Hannibal was shrewd and Will's upper hand lasted for about two minutes and ended with Hannibal's feral grin and them both freezing before landing a blow both of them would have regretted, had it landed.

"A draw?" Will drawled.

Hannibal pushed him down and kissed him.

Will groaned and went as far as trying to say something with his mouth otherwise occupied, but opted for kissing Hannibal back.

When they parted, both men looked dazed. "You've just broken up with your girlfriend, this is sick," Will said, short for breath and tight of pants. "But fuck it, I am unstable after all. Go for it." He tilted his head, offering Hannibal his mouth once again.

"I'm not sleeping sleeping with you today," Will gasped after that kiss had to end as well. "I might sleep sleep as in actual sleep with you if you want, but in the room I've been occupying. You have a lot of rooms, Hannibal, we have to go out sometime, all three of us, to let your parents fuck everywhere in peace."

"This is a brilliant idea," Hannibal agreed. He stood up and offered his hand and help to Will.

Will pulled him back down. "Or we can sleep here, because we're both terribly unstable, unhealthy and every bad thing."

"Will, I can't even find words for your brilliance."

They fell asleep on the carpet, amongst the discarded paper tiles, cuddling for warmth and ignoring their middle aged brains' warnings about stiff necks.

Chapter End Notes

> See? They kinda got together, had a fist fight and it's all going to be soft from this moment on.

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

Here comes Hannigram! Silly sex is had.
CW: Mischa has a breakdown and Simonetta is a tired mom sometimes.

The following morning was that of a Saturday and for some inexplicable reason called *spending the night on the floor with Hannibal Lecter softly snoring down Will's neck* Will had overslept. He'd missed the Shabbat services in the synagogue, there was no way he could gather himself up and make it on time enough to attend even the afternoon prayer. The Lecters had made him far too keen on waking up properly, stretching, enjoying a shower, a walk, and some good food.

There was a blanket over them and judging by the smell, it had to have been Simonetta who'd brought it. Another way the Lecters had changed him, he mused fondly. Being happy and relaxed and *belonging* sharpened his senses like nothing else ever could.

He remembered how his rabbi had once told him that being so uncaring and unaware of his needs in hopes of becoming a better person was a terribly Christian thing to do. She hadn't expected him to moan and whine about being a bad Jew, in addition to everything else. Since studying to become a rabbi implies some basics of social work and psychotherapy, she muttered that his feelings had been valid and never spoke of it again.

"Hannibal?" Will called, turning around. "Hannibal!"

Hannibal sat up and growled menacingly.

"Whoa! What's wrong with you? I missed the Shabbat services. Now you'll have to become a rabbi like in two minutes and find me ten Jews, now." Will was teasing of course, but the older man, still sleepy, rose to his feet, elegant as anything elegant, be it a tiger, an ostrich or Nuriev in the morning (doubtful, that) and stumbled his way towards a bookshelf… only they were in the living room and there were no bookshelves. "I remember putting my Talmud right here!" Hannibal complained.

Will, being unstable and all, mentally skipped from just having fallen in love to planning a marriage proposal in no time at all.

He jumped up to his feet and made haste to hold Hannibal from behind. "I was kidding, baby, it's OK. We'll just have to do something special, is all…"

Hannibal gasped and looked at his watch. "I've failed to make breakfast! They must all be hungry now!" He tried to move away but he was still sleepy and Will was clingy, as he had

been told numerous times. "Will," he rasped, catching sight of the younger man. "Oh… Will."

"Yeah, that's me and I'm here. Nothing has burnt, I'm sure your parents are busy in their own unique way. I can't hear the dogs, so Mischa had to have taken them out for a walk."

"All alone outside with seven dogs!"

"Hannibal! Hannibal, she has seven dogs with her and one of them is Buster who's been doing very well in his service dog training. It's OK. Let's have a shower, change our clothes… You know, the usual."

Hannibal held Will so hard Will had to perch his head on Hannibal's shoulder in order to continue breathing.

"You surprised me," Hannibal confided.

"You surprised me too. Why do you growl when you wake up anyway?" Will rubbed soothing circles into Hannibal's admirably muscular back.

"We were attacked one winter. The times were hard, it was just after the Soviet Union had collapsed. Mother and I, we fought them off with a couple of skillets… I gutted a man too…"

"With a skillet?"

"No, I had a fish knife with me as well… I'm sorry, I shouldn't be talking about that."

"You know, for a psychiatrist, you have a lot of unprocessed trauma. But fuck it, let's get on living." Will pulled back and smiled at Hannibal. "Hey, you made me happy, you know? It's my turn, I think."

"Will…"

"Yeah, keep saying my name like that." Will held Hannibal again.

He managed to send Hannibal to shower in the end and went to the kitchen himself. It was empty and mostly untouched.

Will found a thermos of coffee with a note from Anatol informing him, well, them that they had gone out for a walk with Mischa and the dogs. A postscript by Simonetta added that they had to be good.

Will chuckled and went to Hannibal's bedroom and bathroom to inform Hannibal, who had been shaving and half naked, that all was fine.

"It's fine," Will repeated, his mouth dry. Fuck it, when his brain caught on, it caught on alright, so much so in fact that it risked giving him whiplash.

"Will? You're staring," Hannibal informed him. He was, thankfully, back to his smug self.

"Yeah, just… seeing something I like. Don't kiss me, I haven't brushed my…"

Hannibal was kissing him, pressing Will to himself firmly and surely.

"Teeth," Will finished weakly when Hannibal moved on to his neck and shoulders… Shoulders… Hannibal had undone his shirt, and… and oh, that mouth! That clever, warm, wet mouth, and those suds of shaving cream being smudged on Will's skin. Hannibal smelled so good, kissed Will so tenderly…

"Your… your mother told us to be good."

"Am I doing something bad?" Hannibal asked, unbearably smug.

"Nah… no… no, you're too good… fuck!" Hannibal got rid of Will's shirt and was now kissing down his sternum.

"Something I shouldn't do?" Hannibal asked.

"Yeah, you shouldn't stop… fuck, fuck, Hannibal, please, you shouldn't stop… fuck, this is so unhealthy!"

"Never thought myself healthy in a healthy way," Hannibal joked and closed his lips around one of Will's nipples.

"Fuck! No… I mean, yes… Hannibal, please!"

"What is it, my beautiful boy?" Hannibal straightened up and looked at Will in concern.

"Are you fucking kidding me? Your family are out and we have to be good, so either you ravish me real quick, because I won't last anyway or we go and I watch you make breakfast!" Will threatened.

"Do you find my kitchen performance arousing?" Hannibal asked seriously. He pulled down Will's pants and underwear and touched Will's cock. Just touched, the damn tease!

"If you're going to psychoanal… Fuck!" Will grabbed Hannibal's shoulders and thrusted into Hannibal's conveniently formed fist.

"Speaking of anal," Hannibal continued without missing a beat.

"No, no, you're not making me laugh right now."

"Arsenic," Hannibal deadpanned. Will came all over his hand and almost collapsed on the floor. Hannibal caught and held him. "What a marvelously weird kink you have, Will."

"Fuck you. You know it, you know it, you bastard, that it's because… because we have some stupid jokes between us. Fuck." Will squirmed out of Hannibal's hold and fell to his knees.

"Vengeful, aren't you?" Hannibal asked, using up the last of his smugness.

Will yanked Hannibal's underwear down and sucked on the tip of Hannibal's cock. "Tell me she'd never done it to you. Tell me or I'll bite your cock off!"

Hannibal gazed down at Will in awe. "You're welcome to try but the bleeding will be… Will!"

Will had no interest in the medical details, so he took a deep breath and swallowed Hannibal whole. "You sick, sick, twisted idiot," Will spat all over Hannibal's cock. "I'm gonna be so bad your mom will love me even better!"

Before either of them could analyse (ha-ha) this tremendous and very true notion, Will swallowed him again.

For once it was Will who couldn't shut up. He slathered more of his saliva on Hannibal's Baltic pride. "You're so much bigger than any other guy I blew…"

Hannibal snarled. It wasn't even diminished by the leftover shaving cream or a perfectly Freudian pillow talk without any pillows involved.

"Calm down, baby, they were small, I didn't get to make an Eddington… effort! I meant effort!"

"Just suck my cock, you wicked thing!" Hannibal demanded.

"What, you don't want to talk about physics and politics?" Will licked from Hannibal's balls to the tip of his Vilnius. "Or just you know, the theory of relativity?"

"I'm going to strangle you and eat your brain because I want to know how you can think of anything else!" Hannibal growled again.

"My precious monster," Will teased and did suck that Vilnius for some time. "Do you know how terrible my pornhub history is? It's totally wicked. In my defense, Mischa wanted to get a vivid image of a cunnilingus and I'm a far better older brother than you'll ever be. OK, it sounded better in my head." Will sucked some more. "I wasn't there! I showed her what I found and left to chop some wood… you know, the feral lumberjack that I secretly am…" Will carefully bit at Hannibal's dick. "She was very disappointed by the way. See, they don't talk much in porn. Maybe you and I should make some, hm?" He hollowed his cheeks and sucked Hannibal in particularly hard.

"Will, jokes aside, I'm close…"

"Misogynistic websites say that semen is very nutritious. And conservative Jewish theology says I shouldn't let any of your sperm go to waste. But I've missed my services so…" He stroked Hannibal a few times more and held the nearby towel to Hannibal's ego.

"You… are very wicked."

"I know. Make us breakfast, Hannibal. We would all die without your eggs and bacon." Will grinned and smooched Hannibal's soft tummy. "Please?" Will batted his eyelashes.

"I can never say no to you, do you know that? Do you realise what kind of power you hold over me?" Hannibal asked, helping Will to his feet and *staring* at him.

"I don't want it," Will shook his head. "I want to spar with Mischa and imagine killing quite a lot of people in graphic detail."

"My precious darling…" Hannibal kissed all over Will's face, never minding the messy beard. "My beautiful, impossible, perfect Will!"

"Yeah, that's too much. Let's have breakfast."

While Hannibal was cooking and Will was showering, the remaining Lecters returned.

"Have you been good?" Simonetta asked sternly, lurking behind her son but failing, much to her pride, to scare him.

"Depends on your definition of good," Hannibal replied and started plating the eggs.

"Good means all parties are satisfied," Anatol lurked, loudly, and gave his boy a *look* which would have worked, had not Anatol been the softest of fathers.

"Verges too close to Alana," Mischa raised her hidden sword to Hannibal's throat. "Hello, brother."

"I've made breakfast," Hannibal tried to argue.

"Now, if you want to spank him, I'm firmly against it." Will saved Hannibal by walking into the kitchen in the midst of his hopeless fight with his wet hair.

"Oh no, darling, all yours," Simonetta smiled at Will and commanded retreat.

"You're being very mean to Hannibal, he's just broken up with his girlfriend and slept with me on the floor!" Will stood in front of Hannibal, feigning protection. He was indeed armed with a towel.

"Will, I can sort it on my own," Hannibal said very seriously but equally obviously in on the joke.

"Like fuck you can! You've just had an Olympic champion holding a sword to your throat! Mischa, I challenge you!"

"Why, fine, ok! You boomer!" Mischa shrugged.

"A boomer! I'll have you know I'm much younger than…"

He ducked when Mischa attacked and caught her sword with his towel, disarming Mischa for the first time.

"Wow," Mischa praised.

"Can we eat?" Hannibal was getting too affectionate, emotional and impatient.

"Yeah, yeah, we will," Mischa squinted at Will. "Well done, little brother."

"I'm not little!" Will gasped. "I'm perfectly sized for a middle-aged Jew."

"Which reminds me," Simonetta interrupted and corralled everyone into the dining room. "You've missed the services. I didn't want to wake you up. But I did call your rabbi and explained the situation on the voicemail."

"Sex on Shabbat is a mitzvah," Will informed and immediately blushed. "I didn't… we didn't. We were good!"

"I certainly hope so," Simonetta said with a smirk.

"Anyway, it's Shabbat and we must do something special. I mean, I must but I need you because I won't light fire on Shabbat but that's what I have you goyim for." He was having his revenge and being unapologetic about it.

"If I'm not mistaken, you shouldn't force any goyim into the Shabbat inappropriate behaviour," Hannibal remarked.

"Shouldn't? Of course. But wouldn't? I'm a bad Jew."

"Isn't it hot in here?" Mischa snapped. "It is! What did you have in mind, big little brother?"

"Well, I thought we could go back to mine and have a barbecue," Will suggested.

"Oh, I'd love that." Anatol smiled dreamily.

While Mischa and Will had their morning sparring session and Anatol tried to enjoy his morning paper in peace, Simonetta helped Hannibal with the dishes. Afterwards Will loaded Mischa and the dogs into his car and drove off, followed by Hannibal's Bentley carrying the older Lecters to Wolf Trap. The Lecters and quite some food.

Will dragged his grill from the barn and washed it. Mischa took the dogs to the woods, and Will kept his ear on her. Apparently she was fighting a shitload of towels and a few trees. Buster whined worriedly and Mischa comforted him every now and then.

Hannibal occupied Will's so-called kitchen while Anatol and Simonetta took a stroll in the woods and pretended to be ignorant of Mischa's whereabouts.

The weather was lovely, utterly perfect for the end of winter. Will pulled Hannibal out of the kitchen at some point to have him start the fire. Will called him *a good goy* for that and kissed him.

"Can you believe you were stupid enough to settle for the next best thing?" Will asked him afterwards.

"I can. I think it only proves how silly I am for you," Hannibal countered cleverly.

"You sly bastard." Will kissed him again. "You could have just waited for me to catch up, you know."

"I wouldn't have insulted you by thinking you'd come around."

"I… I like you awfully much, you know? I'm proud of myself for making an idiot out of Dr Lecter. Sounds like a great achievement. Are you busy in the kitchen?"

"Just need to finish with the meat, then I can join you outside."

"Why, please go and cheat on me with meat!" Will laughed. Hannibal kissed him, paused and kissed him again.

"I haven't cheated on you and I never intend to."

"I know." Will nodded softly. "But you deal with your vulnerability by being smug and me, I mock myself and the rest of the world. Come back to me."

"Always."

"You're just going to the kitchen. I'm being such an idiot… Oh, see what I'm talking about."

The food turned out delicious. Hannibal didn't argue with his family when they insisted on eating with their hands. Mischa cried about never wanting to leave and ended up in a big family hug, every participant of which told her that she didn't have to leave.

Will's house couldn't provide enough space for everyone, and no one wanted to let him stay on his own, unless of course he wanted that. He didn't.

Upon their return to Baltimore, Mischa went to bed, sad and exhausted and accompanied by her mother.

Anatol sighed and asked for some strong alcohol, so Will and Hannibal sat with him in Hannibal's study for some time in silence. None of them offered any insights or observations; all of them were aware of Mischa, but not wary of her.

Simonetta came down some time later, poured herself a glass of vodka and downed it. "Never have kids," she told Will, frustrated, angry, having forgotten all her poise for a moment. "I'm sorry. Pardon me. That was unseemly."

Anatol stood up and approached her gingerly; opened his arms and waited. Simonetta glared at him, a lifetime of shared parental experiences passed between them. She sagged into his arms and sobbed, just once.

"Just so you know, I love her to pieces and I don't want her to be any different," she explained unnecessarily. "But fungi, it's hard."

"Of course, mother, we know," Hannibal said calmly.

"Hey, we're all bitches sometimes," Will offered. "And I think it was a wrong thing to say… Not that it's inaccurate per se, but…" Hannibal shut him up with a kiss.

"Get a room," Simonetta recommended tiredly, but she was smiling.

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

> CW: there's peeing, some discussions of shitting, some quotes from Song of Songs. Beware.

Will said he wouldn't take a shower. When Hannibal expressed his surprise and disbelief by a minute change in his facial expression, Will rolled his eyes and asked if Hannibal disliked his smell.

To Hannibal's delight, Will obviously hadn't been expecting Hannibal to approach Will in all his post shower glory and smell him.

Will stuttered but swiftly recovered his sassiness. "So, your verdict?"

"You smell wonderful. But isn't it itchy?" Hannibal asked, failing to realise he was giving away too much.

Will cupped his face and looked at him with such fondness, such thoroughness that said look might as well have been an endoscopy.

"See you to your guts," Will said, equally fond of Hannibal's guts. That was a new feeling. Did all people who loved each other experience that moment of utter acceptance when no bodily function, no ablution, no silliness was enough to ruin that trust? "Bet you weren't expecting me to be so crass. Well, that's me. You seem to like it."

Hannibal kissed his unshowered love.

"And I don't get itchy. Why would I? All my clothes are second hand and have been worn in by someone else's suffering." Will cradled Hannibal's head and pulled it to rest on his shoulder.

"I need to get you some properly good clothes," Hannibal moaned.

"If that is your kink, then fine. I'll even put up a show for you. But don't expect me to dress like a count because I love one," Will said easily. Hannibal moaned again and crashed Will to the bed with all his weight, might and trauma.

Will played with Hannibal's hair, both that on the head and the chest hair too.

"No nipples," Hannibal murmured.

"Could bite them off, if you want," Will promised.

"You'd wish to consume me?" Hannibal raised his head. "Is that what you want?"

"Don't you?" Will asked knowingly.

"I do." With a soft exhale, Hannibal returned to his nest between Will's shoulder and neck.

"Of course neither of us is kosher," Will mused.

"If I ate you, I'd keep you safe," Hannibal whispered.

"Nope, not unless you never shit. And I bet you do. And oh, once you shit, you'll send us all down the drain."

"Never thought about it," Hannibal admitted.

"Bet you didn't. You're a poetic cannibal."

They lay together for a while, until Hannibal just had to get up and turn off the lights. Then he rejoined Will on the bed, clingy and cuddly, much to Will's delight.

"You know, no one has ever needed me for myself. All those who told me they needed me, they needed only some part of me. And you need me whole. You'd swallow me whole… whoever dies first, Hannibal, gets to eat the other, ok? I'm serious. I'll break kashrut for you."

Hannibal rose on his elbows and kissed Will. "Why, for you, my darling boy, I'd grow split hooves. I'll ruminate like a cow. I'll be a total old goat, for you."

"Or you could just turn into a fish. Into a salmon. You're fancy like that." Will held Hannibal very, very tight. "I'll become a trout… let us all be fish in the next life. Oh, I can picture you and Mischa slap any grizzly bear with your tails…"

"I've missed you," Hannibal whispered. "I've missed you so much, I've missed you my entire life, and you've taken so long, darling…"

"Sorry about that," Will kissed Hannibal's forehead. "I won't make you miss me again."

"Please don't. It was unbearable. So many fish in the ocean and none of them my own," Hannibal complained, nuzzling Will's neck and ear.

"I'm thinking very hard about arses, you know? I refuse to be penetrated by you so soon after Alana. I refuse to establish my superiority by penetrating you, because that mindset is just toxic."

"Is Alana dairy or meat that you don't want to mix?" Hannibal asked.

"I'm afraid she's perfectly parve. Neither here, nor there. Still…"

"I have an idea," Hannibal proposed. "I'll buy us two dildos, and we can touch each other and make love to each other while being penetrated by each other by proxy."

"This is rabbinically brilliant! I'll lick all over yours, you can come all over mine. I should fucking punish you for being so set on self harm. And when I'm down from my high, I'll leave you for a night and I'll find your aunt and I'll kill her."

Hannibal sobbed. "Please… please do. Please don't. Please, Will."

"OK, got it," Will said, and he did, even if Hannibal didn't.

"What else would you like to do to me?" Hannibal enquired.

Will turned them over to straddle Hannibal's thighs.

"The man you gutted. How did you do it? Show me."

Hannibal slowly dragged his thumbnail slightly above Will's navel.

"How did it feel?" Will leaned down, bringing Hannibal's arms over his head and pinning them there. Even in the dark his eyes were glowing, angry and vicious.

"Amazing. I'd have done it again, but… for all my trains of thought running in multiple directions at the same time, I'd never found the time to indulge my love of mutilation beyond a morgue, a surgery, a piece of art…"

"Would you have gutted me?" Will asked. He sounded as if he had known the answer.

"Yes, I would have. If you betray me or Mischa, I'd gut you. I wouldn't kill you, I'd just gut you, I'd let you live, I'd let you stew in your guilt."

"That's my goy," Will whispered and leaned lower still for a kiss. "You're so controlled, so… so good, so twisted, so perfect, fuck, I love you so much, fuck you, Hannibal, I haven't even known I was capable of it. Fuck you!" He spat out.

"You can." Hannibal relaxed underneath him. "You can, now, tomorrow, any time."

"Nope, not gonna. Gonna eat you whole, gonna suck you dry, your choice, but won't fuck you now. You're punished, Hannibal. I wouldn't have even known that I could be loved so, and you showed it to me, only to go and fuck someone else. I'm still pretty mad about it." Will paused. "You know, I'm circumcised. Shut up, I know you've noticed. It's a necessary exposition. And so…" He licked up from Hannibal's solar plexus to his Adam's apple. "This piece of my dick is a crucial part of my covenant with the Lord. Now, there are multiple interpretations of said act. None dares accuse the Lord of penile envy… Do you think that my Lord has a small dick?"

"I don't know whether I should weep or laugh," Hannibal said, laughing.

"It would have made my Lord very Freudian." Will bit just behind Hannibal's ear. "And Freud was a Jew. Oh, I should talk to my rabbi about it."

"I'd say," Hannibal said, "that your Lord has huge balls. As for the dick, well, who knows?"

"Who knows indeed…" Will pulled at Hannibal's earlobe with his teeth. "Who knows what's between my Lord's legs or if They even have legs? Maybe they don't… I love my Lord because They're mysterious like that."

"But you do have legs," Hannibal said, his hands on Will's nape. "Long and beautiful and hairy. Love your legs." He moaned.

"Hmmm… want them around your head?"

"Did you lead me into a blow job with a theological dispute about some divine genitalia?" Hannibal asked, utterly smitten.

"I might have? What say you?"

Hannibal, instead of answering, scooted down between Will's legs and took Will's cock into his mouth.

"Valid argument…" Will praised in a weak voice. "But I didn't expect any less of you… you're a psychiatrist after all…"

Hannibal hollowed his cheeks and sucked like a good Hoover. (A/N: I hope you never do any vacuum cleaning without thinking about getting some awesome oral sex ever again. You deserve good oral sex. Unless it's not your thing.)

"Fuck… fuck, Hannibal, and what if I like, collapse into your mouth?" Will threatened.

Hannibal sucked harder and put a hand on Will's arse, pulling him towards the abyss, that is, Hannibal's mouth.

"Ok, fuck, you die, I die, we all die…" Will's arms gave up and he did collapse. Judging by Hannibal's muffled moans, that was exactly what he had been trying to achieve.

Will strove and succeeded to lift himself just enough to see Hannibal's erection.

" *Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest is my lover among the young men* ," Will recited, love drunk and quite a bit sultry.

" *And his fruit is sweet to my taste* ," Hannibal quoted back, abandoning Will's *steed in Pharaoh's chariot* .

"Fuck you…"

" *Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; thine eyes are as doves* ," Hannibal muttered before taking Will back into his goy mouth.

"You… you… you're my blasphemy and the highest worship… and thanks for abusing my empathy to the point that my dirty talk is the song of Solomon…" Still he continued, out of joint, order and breath. " *He hath brought me to the banqueting-house, and his banner over me is love. 'Stay ye me with dainties, refresh me with apples; for I am love-sick.' Let his left hand be under my head, and his right hand embrace me* ."

Will came, if only to make it possible for Hannibal to fulfill his by far favourite verse of the Song of Songs. So that Hannibal could have his left hand under Will's head and embrace him with his right.

" *Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away* ," Hannibal recited sweetly. " *For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone…* "

*

Come morning, a very grumpy Will rose from the bed and went to shower.

When he came back to Hannibal, all soft and hot, he bent him in half and licked at his arse.

"Darling, I need to…"

"To pee, yeah, I know. Guess what, Song of Songs can't save you now. Do your worst." Will licked at Hannibal's arse again and again, growled and bit, sucked and pushed.

"Will, I…"

"I want you to do it. Pee all over me. I don't care. Do it." Will returned to his task.

The only precaution he took was closing his eyes. Hannibal went breathless above him, powerless for once, so obedient and sweet.

Will helped him rise from the bed and led him to the bathroom. He washed Hannibal with the fancy soaps and the softest touches. He took him into his mouth and worshipped him like a bad Jew.

"You won't hide a thing from me," Will commanded. Oh, he was the best student of his Lord. "I'm not some dainty damsel, some fragile man, some bastard. I'm yours and you're mine and if you need to pee all over my head, then you will. You hear me? You will.

"And when you feel too insecure to remain your regal self, you come to me, Hannibal. You come to me. I'll come to you too."

*

Hannibal cooked a feast for breakfast. Mischa looked a bit overwhelmed, so Hannibal quickly served her her favourite scrambled eggs and she calmed down.

Will and Mischa took the dogs into the yard and sparred while Will's pack peed all over the place. Anatol insisted on having just one damn morning when he could fight the New York Times crossword in peace, to which Simonetta just huffed and went to play go with herself in Hannibal's study.

Eventually, Mischa joined her and Will and Hannibal decided they were good enough to fight the girls.

The game ended in a draw, but by that time Hannibal had to start cooking lunch and Anatol was still struggling with the crossword and a few of Hannibal's dictionaries.

Hannibal decided to be really simple, so he made some pita bread, red lentil hummus and shakshuka. As they ate, Anatol admitted to having been defeated by the New York Times, so the rest of the family tried to help him. Anatol responded by being very grumpy but accepting.

"I've been thinking," Will suddenly began. Everyone abandoned Anatol and looked at him. Including Anatol.

"Yes?" Simonetta prompted.

"I don't want to go back to work and I have some money saved. So… so I thought either I study to become a marine vet or I just… I mean, it depends on Hannibal, but…"

"Just spit it out," Anatol begged in a rare show of frustration.

"I'd love to travel with you guys. But I mean… I'd want to travel with Hannibal too… OK, this is very undercooked."

The table erupted with ideas.

Mischa did her bookkeeping and told Will how many credits he needed to qualify for a marine vet; and Hannibal said that nothing would stop him from following Will anywhere; and Simonetta asked why Will thought he had to work anyway if he had them; and Anatol asked another perplexing question from the New York Times; and Will said he had to work; and Simonetta said it was too plebeian, working, since they had been so good at investing and so forth.

Will went to bed with a headache.

"I'm not joking. It's a headache."

"Should I kiss it better?" Hannibal asked.

He had severely underestimated Will, however, because Will with a headache buried his face in Hannibal's arse and said, sending delicious vibrations all along Hannibal's body, that down there, stuffed between two buttocks, it was lovely and quiet.

Then he ate Hannibal out like a messy dog with an underbite.

"You… are a demon," Hannibal gasped while Will was cleaning him in the aftermath.

"Dybbuk. Say dybbuk," Will recommended and fell asleep somewhere in the vicinity of Hannibal's come covered stomach. Messy boy.

He woke up in the middle of the night, grumpy and complaining about having to move somewhere warmer.

Hannibal cuddled and warmed him and swore to himself that he'd marry Will no matter what.

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

As usual, a short epilogue.

There was a certain sweetness to the mundane, Will was discovering. Brushing his teeth had never justified a memory, but a moment as complex as the one taking place every morning in their bathroom was worth remembering and worth remembering anew each day.

There they were, in front of the mirror and looking at each other and making horrible faces — and not as a joke, no, just in order to reach farther with the toothbrush.

There was something to be said about Hannibal walking into the bathroom to find Will on the toilet with another book of Italian grammar. "Be my guest," Will would say.

"I'll go and use another bathroom," Hannibal would decide.

"No way, pee in the shower like a normal human…" Will would scribble something and Hannibal would deign to pee in the shower.

"Will you tell anyone?"

"Of course I won't. Can you help me with those nasty verbs?"

Something could also be said about having Hannibal behind his back in the shower and having Hannibal trace those nasty verbs on the foggy glass and demand that Will repeated them, over and over and over, while Hannibal rubbed himself against Will's arse.

"This is a grammar kink. I'm sure all linguists have it," Will would reassure himself and Hannibal. Some of the verbs were washed down by Will's ejaculation. Hannibal, pensive and fond, wrote them again.

"It's unfair that you're so grammatical after my orgasm. I need to fix it."

Hannibal was quite shocked to find out that even Italian verbs could compete with Will's blow job. Before he'd practice his Italian during especially boring sexual encounters. No such luck anymore.

*

Mischa got increasingly more worried, more bothered.

Eventually Anatol softly put his foot down and told his daughter that no one would ever force his girl into anything.

"But what will I do?" She asked, crying.

"Just nothing," Simonetta said. "The whole point of being rich is to have all the means to just enjoy life. I don't care about the rest of the world, I must admit. The rest of the world doesn't care for me either. We're growing old, Mischa, not just me and father. All of us. Let's have some fun, some eternal spring, hm?"

"And damn the consequences?" Mischa asked, offending her mother with her doubts.

*

The Lecters moved onto Will's house – after some Hannibal inspired renovations of course. Hannibal sold his house.

Will started building a yacht for them all. He quite loved how it turned out — not, not the yacht, no, the whole setting around its construction, with Hannibal being doting, with Anatol finally free to enjoy his crosswords without any pressing need to think of something else, with Simonetta relaxing enough to follow her own advice and enjoying life, with Mischa messing around with dogs, fighting trees, distracting Will from his nautical endeavours…

There was nothing else, though. Both their happiness and their discomfort were of their own design. No one dared bothering them, even when Hannibal closed his practice as fast as could have been accomplished politely and disappeared from Baltimore without a trace.

And if Jack came looking for Will, he was chased away by Mischa who didn't mean to scare anyone but as it happened, was running with one of her swords and seven dogs at her feet.

And if Alana came looking for Hannibal, she found nothing but a quaint empty farmhouse with a half finished yacht in the yard. The Lecters had gone to the oceanarium that day.

And if journalists came looking for Mischa Lecter, well, there was nothing to see, for the yacht had been finished and the entire family had sailed.

And if a whale passed by, well, it was greeted with love and wonder.

And if Will, being the captain of his yacht, decided he could get married to his first mate, he did so.

And if they lived happily ever after… they did.

End Notes

Thanks for being here. I dearly love comments.

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